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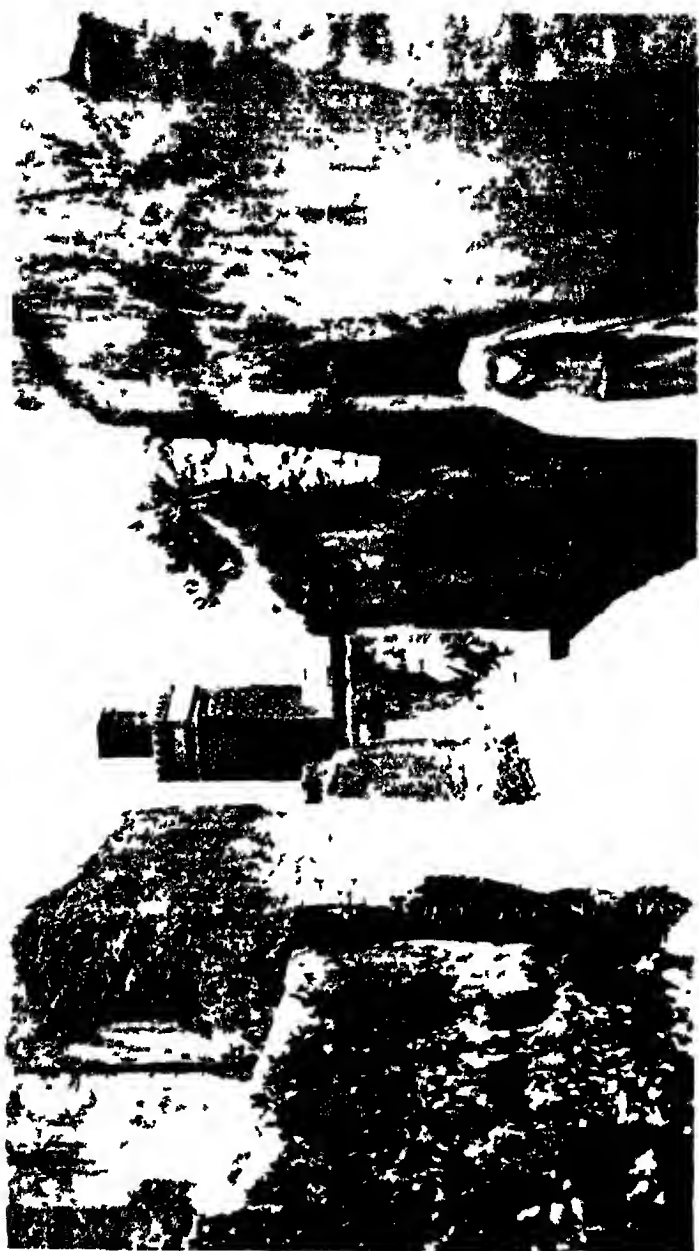
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DEATH SQUADS IN MOROCCO

As told to

W. J. BLACKLEDGE

By

EX-LÉGIONNAIRE

TERRY BRENNAN

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DEATH SQUADS IN MOROCCO

CHAPTER I

A BATH AND A BAGGAGE

It was a night that dripped with the soft mellow light of a low-hanging, orange-coloured moon. Every particle of scattered vegetation stood out in stark relief over that flat sheet of earth, which gleamed under the moon's rays like polished steel. It was a night for dreams, romance, love, the joy of life. A glorious night. A night that remains in memory for ever.

There was nothing of beauty, however, in that which was being enacted before my startled eyes. I strained at the cords that bound me, not because I hoped to get free of them. I was too securely trussed. But I had to make some move, some sign of life, however restricted, or I should go stark raving mad.

There, less than a dozen yards from where I sat bound to a camel-pack, was my pal Kelton, a lovable rascal of uncertain pedigree who had shared a thousand scraps with me. We had been buddies through some three years of campaigning with the Spanish Foreign Legion in Morocco. We had lived, fought, caroused, sweated and cussed through all manner of risks, hazards and tough spots. We had become as brothers—only more so.

And now! I had to sit by, trussed like a fowl, while these insane Berbers of the North African

hinterland tortured the guts out of my pal. In the beginning I had yelled, screamed, spat every sort of vile imprecation upon the brown devils who had forced me to witness their fiendish atrocities. I had roared till my mouth foamed and bled, until I could rage no more.

But Kelton had uttered never a sound. Only his face told of the horror seeping out of him as he endured the ghastly torment. His brown eyes were distended with terror . . . those same eyes which were wont to fascinate with their mischievous laughter. His sweat-streaked, dusty, bearded face was twisted out of all recognition by the fright of excruciating pain and the slits made with the knife from the base of his nose down along upper lip. Blood trickled from a mouth writhing with uncontrollable anguish.

"Kelton!" I screamed.

He turned his terror-filled eyes towards mine. I shrieked again and again. How much more must he stand—how much could he stand—before losing consciousness from hellish pain and draining blood?

And there were other shrieks—shrieks of maniacal laughter from the group of men and women who sat about in the wide circle of which my wretched friend was the blood-streaming central figure.

He was being subjected to the slow, agonising torture of the thousand cuts. He had been stripped of all clothing, bound to a stake. Before him stood a big, muscular nomad, black eyes aglitter, stained knife in hand. A yard away a sniggering woman sat on her great haunches in the dirt with a sack containing a thousand pebbles beside her. As

cut was made she took a pebble from the sack and threw it on the ground. The heap of pebbles was still small—pitifully small compared with the sack.

There were roars of laughter as each pebble was tossed out. Jeering men, lascivious women, yelled their sadistic suggestions to the one who held the knife. Some of the more brutal, raw-boned wenches, fingered their knives anticipatigly. Others looked on fixedly, with the light of that horrible lust in their eyes so peculiar to these Berber women. They waited impatiently for their turns in the bestial entertainment. They made a wild, cackling raucity as they shouted of their intentions—designs so dreadful that they may not be hinted at.

How can I ever forget that moon-drenched night of horror?—the circle of guffawing, blood-lusting men and women, the awful central figure who was my friend, the fires beyond, slowly dying like my pal, the black tents so appropriate, the slumbering camels, the fat-tailed sheep, the wide expanse of silver-sheeted plain, that weirdly-coloured moon hanging low like a great lantern suspended from the gloom of the heavens, making this night of frightful memory almost as light as day.

How long would they keep up this gory performance? How could a man live under such treatment, much less keep his senses and remain sane?

I had known Kelton for a regular tough wallah. But even so, there was something shockingly human, frightfully superhuman, about this endurance. I prayed for him then, prayed as I have never done before nor since, prayed that he might faint, or lose consciousness, or die right there and then on his

feet—anything rather than that he should continue to endure this unspeakable torture, know every little thrust of the knife. . . .

We had had some weird experiences together, Kelton and I, and many a perilous escape from death away in the Atlas during our skirmishes with these treacherous folk. And I, at all events, was destined for many more. But there was never an occasion so fraught with horror as that night when the “friendly Berbers” started to indulge in their ensanguined pastimes.

It all came about through our crazy desire for a bath! To think that such a natural desire should have so tragic a result!

We had been among a patrol surrounded and captured by hostile tribesmen, and had escaped while being conveyed to the Berbers’ stronghold in the hills. Thereafter days of trekking in the guise of natives over dry hills and through broken valleys where life offered little but patches of desert brush and cactus scrub.

We had campaigned long enough in the country to know something of the Arabic dialects, so that we were not greatly concerned when we ran into a wandering band of nomads roaming the countryside in search of fodder for sheep and camels. Instead of trying to run away, we stood our ground boldly, told the Berbers we were Moors from the international zone of Tangier who had been into the Atlas on a trading venture.

These people of the ~~wilds~~ disliked the Moorish Arabs of Tangier, did in fact loathe all city Arabs; but they were ready to accept us as good Moslem

brethren and to put us on our way through the hills to the valley which would lead to the green plains of the Protectorate.

At dusk of the fourth day of our sojourning with the nomads we came to the mouth of the valley, and there before us lay the vast, rolling green plains of western Morocco. We gave them the peace of Allah and continued on our way. It was during that night, little more than an hour after we had left their camp, that we came upon a pool nestling among some rocks in a fold of the plains.

It appeared deliciously inviting in the light of that moon! We had not washed for many days, dared not, lest the whiteness of our skins below the shoulders should be revealed to the curious and somewhat distrustful Berbers. In short, we itched for a bath! It was too much to resist.

Itch is correct. Our mode of life during the past few weeks, ever since we had left the outpost to make that sortie which had ended in our capture, had covered us with body lice. To white men, this is damnable torment. To the nomads of Morocco, it is nothing at all. They are born with lice nests and they keep them all their lives. In the sight of Allah the louse has a right to existence. The Berbers have tough skins, anyway. Baths are unknown to them. Sometimes they would freshen face and neck with a good scrub of sand, and they liked to grease their tangled locks with mutton fat.

After a few weeks of that kind of life, a white man begins to feel like one whale of a louse.

So we divested ourselves of clothing in the shelter of that bunch of rocks and sought the cool refreshing

waters of the pool. We were disporting ourselves in this heaven-sent luxury when five of the women from the band we had left came upon us, stole upon us would perchance be more apt.

The sheer drama of that encounter got us both by the throat. No good Moslems ever had such white skins as ours. The mahogany of our tan ended at the shoulders. For the rest, we were as white as God made us. And the women saw it all before we had time to do anything!

What a hullabaloo those dames set up! First they stared with open-mouthed astonishment. Then they began to chatter and gesticulate. After which they turned and raced back to their menfolk, yelling and yodelling like a pack of jackals on the trail.

Our first instinct was to run. We soon saw the futility of that. Where could we go in that bewildering expanse of sand and stone and scrub-grass? The Berber wenches brought up their men. They were shouting and guffawing fit to beat the band. No sooner had we put on our clothes than they were *torn off again*.

Thus, naked as the day on which we were born, we were dragged back to the Berbers' camp—under the prods and jostlings and evil horseplay of these wanton women of the wilds. Our feeble deception was at an end.

Naturally we protested. We feigned our amazement at this brutal attitude towards two good Moslems from Tangier. Were not many Moors from the city white of skin? What was so unusual about that? We might have saved our breath. The more we protested, the louder the guffaws. I suppose that, in

the dull, monotonous lives of these folk, we then became a source of entertainment such as they had not experienced in years.

They took great advantage of the situation. They were thirsting for just such a diversion. We had acquired sufficient of their tongue to realise that our capture in this way, was but the culmination of many suspicious errors of behaviour of which we had been quite unaware during our stay with them.

Naturally they attempted to find out who and what we were, and how we came to be in that part of Morocco. We gave them no satisfaction. Save to insist that we were good Moors from Tangier. That was our story and we stuck to it. They went over the whole situation from the time we linked up with them.

Then one of the mob had an inspiration. He accused us of being deserters from the Spanish Foreign Legion. Neither of us flickered an eyelid.

"May you be reincarnated^s in the belly of a pig for such an insult!" snorted Kelton, cussing in true Arabic fashion.

There was some excuse for his forceful language—besides it was more likely to be convincing by its forcefulness. But it was the very devil of a predicament. Nor is it easy to stand coolly before a yapping, half-civilised bunch of desert folk when one is naked. If we could have had some covering we should have tackled that situation with much more adroitness. Rob a white man of all his clothing and he becomes a forked radish, the most awkward of fools, devoid of all his swagger and self-confidence. You have to stand up to a situation like that to

appreciate fully all that it means. I could have annihilated some of those leering women on the spot!

But it was no good. They had made up their minds to have fun. And they did. So much for our schemes.

We were within a couple of days of our objective when we took that fool bath! That was how I came to be squatting with my torso trussed to a camel-pack, how I was forced to look on while my friend went through the most ghastly of tortures.

Looking back over it now, I guess we were taking on a whole packet of trouble in attempting to use these Berbers in finding our way back to the frontier. That particular area was seething with rebellious and blood-lusting natives. But we were terrible gluttons for trouble.

Even so, if it had not been for that fool idea of a bath, we might have got away with it. Ifs and buts are futile. There can be no place for regrets in the adventurer's life. The end of Kelton, God rest his soul, was damnably slow and fraught with terror. Was that Fate's decree that he should go like that and in such frightful circumstances?

I have seen many men die, but never one so slowly and painfully. That night of horror can never be erased from memory. Other experiences have come and gone. That one caught youth and vigour by the throat and left its ineffaceable mark.

The horror of it was that he remained conscious after more than the first hundred cuts. He was still alive to all that was happening when the women

approached him. He spat his contempt upon them, spat it in a warm gush of blood.

In his eyes was that icy glare that I had noted more than once during the heat and strife of battle. He was fighting then, fighting as he had never fought before, fighting for his sanity. And I by that time was reduced to a croaking fool. I could no longer yell. I was then a gibbering helpless dumbhead.

The things done to him by those gloating women are beyond the power of any man's pen to describe, a tale of sadistic butchering that will never be written.

Even now, the picture of him, slashed to ribbons, freezes the blood. I turned my head away from the bestial horror of it. But something stronger than I drew my eyes again and again, while foaming mouth gibbered and body shivered as if with ague.

Silent he was, save for muttered curses spat upon the jeering, licentious women. How they slavered and leered, those brown women!

I don't know how long that phase endured. That tortured fragment of eternity could not be measured by degrees of time. It was a timeless eon of agony to me—who had but to watch.

I saw the dawn of day pierce the heavens. And then, quite suddenly, it was over. My pal could endure no more. An awful shriek was wrenched from his vitals. The sound of that terror-stricken cry shook me like a blow. The skin seemed to crawl up my spine. I flopped out. For the first time in my life, I had fainted.

Six feet two of brawn and muscle, and I had fainted, I, Terry Brennan¹, world wanderer, tough

¹Obviously not my real name.

wallah so-called, and Spanish Légionnaire, had fainted like a schoolgirl.

So I did not see him die. I think he must have lost consciousness after that heartrending yell. I try to think of it that way, anyhow. I do not see how any human could have borne more and remained conscious. And then the torturing would cease, for these people with their knives did not find any amusement in torturing a senseless thing. It was the reactions they enjoyed. When a victim no longer responded to the prick of the blade the show held no further interest for them.

My last picture of him is of that once-laughing mouth wide open in a piercing shriek, the knotted veins at his temples, the terror in his bulging brown eyes, the hand of that woman upon his person, her grasp . . . and her knife. . . .

I awoke to the swaying motion of a camel seat. The sun was up. We were on the move, driving pack-camels and sheep before us. I must have gone well out, for clothing had been wrapped about me and I had been secured to the seat of this swaying beast.

Seated beside me, one hand grasping the hair cord that bound me, was one of the brown women. With her free hand she was amusing herself cracking lice—surreptitiously, of course, since such a pastime was forbidden.

A miserable awakening in all conscience. A slow remembering. A gradual realisation of my position. I stared round at the band of leisurely-moving men, women and beasts. What had they done with the body? Left it for the jackals?

There must have been forty or fifty in that band. But I never felt so horribly alone in my life. Crazy notions came into my head. I closed my eyes. I'd seen the knife in the waistband of the woman who shared my seat. She must not know that I was awake. My hands lay in front of me, loosely tied. I would be very cunning. I'd snatch the knife suddenly. One slash. . . . It would all be over. Life was no good to me. It could be only a matter of hours anyway before I shared my pal's fate.

Of course I bungled it. The woman had grasped my intention before I could reach the knife. She snapped, grinned, dug me playfully in the belly. Amazingly, she was not perturbed. She was amused.

There was friendliness in her black eyes as she stared into mine. She pointed to the sky and then at my eyes. Apparently they were about the same colour. She told me she was my friend. I wondered what new move this was. She was not deceiving me. I knew she could be as treacherous as the rest of them.

Just the same, it was a strange awakening. The mind worked swiftly. I wondered how I might make use of this friendliness. What was behind it? Why were we on the move again? There was plenty of pasture in the camp we had left behind. Had these Berbers been disturbed at their handiwork? What had they in store for me?

I talked to the woman. Her responses were unmistakably friendly. But she would tell me nothing of what had happened during my sleep of exhaustion. It was finished, she reiterated. I must forget it. Finished. The very word echoed with horror. But there could be no doubt about her attitude.

She was young, this new companion of mine. She had soft dark eyes, and she knew how to use them. Her nose was just a little too wide-spread. Her full-lipped mouth also betrayed the negroid blood in her ancestry. Her brown hands, grasping mine, were small and plump. She was undeniably attractive. Sharing the same seat for hours, I could hardly fail to observe these things.

She told me I was like the Riffians—for, contrary to popular belief, the Riffians are descendants of a white race, fair-haired, blue-eyed, many of them possessed of magnificent physique, and nearly all of them topping six feet. In brief, she was being as flattering as one of her kind could be. Nevertheless, when I came to think it over, I had to realise that I was quite a fair imitation of a Riff!

That might be useful. I began to think out ways and means of escape. As the day advanced I became fixed in my resolve to make a dash at dusk. It was a sporting chance. I'd have to take the woman along. But that problem could be left until later. The thing to do was to cut and run.

Throughout that day, while the sun waxed and waned, even during the halts for meals and prayers, I rehearsed every little move in my mind. Two things filled me with confidence: the attitude of this girl, and the fact that we were riding a dromedary—a far swifter beast than these lumbering pack-camels. Apparently the attitude of these people towards me was like the girl's, friendly. They had honoured me with a scat on one of their best beasts. But I wasn't staying to inquire into the why and wherefore.

The gods had placed this opportunity in my hands

and I intended to make the fullest use of it. If I failed. . . . But I would not think on those lines. Instead, I played with the girl, as men have played with women since the beginning of time. We rode at the head of the band. I gathered she was a person of importance in this clan. She was anxious for me to meet her father, who was chieftain. It was at her bidding that the band was conveying me to the abode of the old man. It was somewhere in the hills and we should ride for two days and two nights.

But not if I could prevent it. I had no desire to turn native. Certainly not with a mob that could do things with their knives—such as I had seen done to my friend. All the time I was responding to the girl's bewitching overtures I was busily planning. Before darkness descended we must be on such intimate terms that but little persuasion would be required for her to release my hands. That was all I wanted.

It began in late afternoon—when I tried to take her hands in mine. The cords would not reach. She smiled. Vision of ripe lips. Flash of white, even teeth. I drew as near as I could, marking with surreptitious heel the slightly increased pace of the beast. She glanced at the cords on my wrists, hesitated. I made no further move. We rode in closer contact for a space. I knew the chit was considering the advisability of loosening the cords.

I had a whole lot of patience. There was time yet. The sun was just beginning to dip. Just the same, I was as excited as the devil. One false move now . . . I should never get another chance. Everything depended on the whim of this mystery woman. She was proud. But she was also young

and impressionable. No doubt it was a great lark for her to be riding thus with the strange white man, who had eyes like the sky, whose hair and stature was so like the bold Riffians.

She had her head up, like a young horse. She kindled with the warmth of the situation. Our close contact brought awareness. With a swift, impetuous impulse she groped for my hands, clasped them in her own for a moment, then drew her knife and cut the cords. Instantly I played my part by grasping her hands. My instinct was to laugh. But I checked it.

We rode that way for miles, *marduff*,¹ hand-fast, body to body, a proud beauty of the Atlas, whose father was an Arabian of the Arabians and whose mother probably had started life as a nubian slave in the household—and an enormously excited Spanish Légionnaire making a desperate bid for freedom.

But I never let go of her hands! The sun had gone. Now! Tip and tuck in the sudden blackness of that valley. Our speed was increasing every minute—I saw to that! I let go her hands only in order to clasp them tautly about her ample waist.

The band were yelling to us to stop. It was time for prayers and the evening meal. But I dug my heels and the beast leapt like one possessed. We tore through the air at a terrific speed. Someone was speeding after us. The race was on. I had not the faintest notion as to direction. All I wanted for the moment was speed, speed and more speed.

For several moments my companion did not realise just what was happening. But soon I knew by her

¹Two on a camel.



A BEAUTY OF THE BERBER CLAN

struggles that she had guessed this was no accident, that I was making an attempt to break away. I held on, my arms clasping her tightly about the waist, while she struggled and writhed and yelled herself hoarse. The long legs of the velvet-footed beast were going like pistons by this time, cleaving a way through space at an incredible speed.

My companion's shouts had warned the others of what was happening. The racket of their pursuing yelps was in my ears, but I never relaxed that vice-like grip about her waist. It seemed that as the speed increased I gripped more tightly. Why I should have held on to her like that, I do not know. I realised afterwards that it would have been wiser to push her off the beast. I should then have been rid of her, my mount lighter and thus able to make even better going.

Instead of which I burdened myself with the chit and checked the speed to some extent by hanging on to her as if to do so were a matter of life and death! I can only put it down to the excitement of that wild dash into the unknown. I must have been crazy just then. Urging the beast with prodding heels and clamping the woman with my arms seemed to be all of a piece, one instinctive action.

The camel responded beautifully. The cool night air whistled past us as we flew through the mysterious gloom. It was an unforgettable ride, more thrilling, more exhilarating than any I can remember. Most of my pursuers appeared to have given up the chase, but for a long time I could hear the padding of a swiftly-moving beast, the cries of ~~its~~ rider, who

seemed to be bawling instructions to the girl, since there were answering cries from her.

She, however, was helpless. My arms pinned her in a vice about her waist. My fingers were locked as if they were never to loosen again. The strain of my clamping legs and gripping arms was enormous—though I was not aware of it at the time.

She was a far better rider than I. I was too excited. I knew how to grip a horse. This one-hump creature was a vastly different proposition. As we swayed from side to side in that wild gallop, leaping, careering, stumbling over scrub and boulder, I knew it was my grip upon her that aided me in keeping seated on that perilous perch.

And all the time she raved like one demented, yelling, foaming at the mouth, striving to reach me with her teeth. Only a little while ago she had been delightfully attractive in her amorous approaches.

Her ferocity was attractive too! She was a savage child robbed of her plaything. Her black eyes were magnificent in her blazing wrath. The nostrils were wide, pulsating. She had the mouth of some jungle beast at bay. I recall her as a superb specimen of the untamed in female species.

I held on. The dromedary raced. The pursuer kept close. My companion did not tire. She twisted, squirmed, writhed, spat venomous curses. She was magnificent, a fountain of virulence even in her helplessness. Verily a wild cat, brown face streaming with perspiration, while she jerked her head this way and that in her endeavours to use splendid teeth.

We must have presented an astonishing sight, racing along like that, her ample body held close to mine,

her head nodding and jerking, mine pulling away, twitching, evading!

And then the beast stumbled over a hummock, careered crazily for several seconds, recovered, flashed on. I thought it was all over. In that perilous breath of time I saw the earth rise up to within inches of my face. We were jerked up again when the beast righted itself, and on we went with the solitary pursuer at our heels, my companion crying to her compatriot at intervals. I guessed she was urging him to keep on our tail.

But I knew then that we had the finer camel. And it didn't matter, anyway. I had decided to hang on until the beast ran itself out. If the wallah behind caught us up—well, it would be just too bad for him, to say nothing of this wench in my arms. If, after all this effort, I could not tackle one of the brethren and this girl as well, I should deserve to pack up.

It should be remembered that I had the ghastliest of tortures still before my eyes, the most agonizing cry still ringing in my ears. The odds had evened up now. I was more than ready for any rough house this wallah behind might set afoot.

It seemed to me in that whirlwind of a night that the beast kept going for hours. He rushed on as if scared. Gradually the sounds of pursuit grew fainter. The man was falling behind. I sensed this as much by sounds right close to me, the last desperate howls of the girl in my arms. She grew more and more violent. The wench felt we should soon be alone in the night. There was fear in her cries then. Terror in her eyes. She started to scream. The last state was infinitely worse than the first.

I had the instinct to let go and knock her on the head. That had to wait. There were still faint sounds of thudding pads. We went on in that fashion for a considerable mile or two, the girl shrieking herself into hysterics, the beast plunging and leaping. I was soaked in sweat. My mouth was bleeding. Strain of clenched teeth.

In her vision I was the unknown quantity. She couldn't help thinking of those things done to my pal while I lay bound and helpless. I guess she didn't have much doubt about my reactions. She certainly had reason to fear.

She screamed herself hoarse, shrieked until exhausted. It ended with gulping sobs that she appeared unable to control. In that comparative silence I was aware we had lost our pursuer. No use bawling any more. Another hour or so and the beast began to show signs of tiring. I let him fall into a lope. He was blowing hard.

And I was thinking hard. Suddenly I let go with one arm and clutched her knife. Then I eased off with the other, took the horrible strain off cramping legs. We rode easy for a space. She had calmed down then. The night was deathly still. Only the catching sobs and the soft pad of splay hoofs broke the silence. There was no more spirit left in the camel, and none at all in the wench.

A fitful moon gave no aid as to direction. I had not the mistiest notion as to what I should do next. Until the dawn light came I could not tell in what direction I was heading. I had time to think then, and it was one whale of a predicament for a lone Legionnaire. Why in hell hadn't I rid myself of

this baggage before? True, I had only to push her off the seat, drop her in this mysterious wilderness and ride on. Maybe I was too weary and beaten to bother.

We still had close contact. I caught her looks. They were too deep for me. I just could not fathom them. But I knew sufficient of these folk to realise that treachery was never far from the surface. I had the knife in one hand and the reins in the other.

We rode in silence, eyeing each other. I guessed there was still a lot of fight in the baggage. Which of us would tire first? I was none too fresh when this crazy stunt began. Whereas she—well, she was as strong as a bullock any way. For a long space never a word passed between us, and she hardly took her eyes from mine. It should be appreciated that our heads were hardly four inches apart.

Maybe I was suffering from nerve-strain. The weird stillness, the drowsy lope of the camel, the watching black eyes, the necessity of keeping guard over her, all began to get me down. I'd always been a man of action. I never could stand this strange cat-and-mouse sort of play.

The truth was, I was beginning to feel drowsy. At first the prickings of terror kept me alert. Once the wench had possession of the knife. . . . Why didn't I stick her, topple her into the dirt, do something? Just because I've never made war on women—not on my own initiative, anyhow.

I tried to break the spell by talking. Had she any idea where we were? But her jaw tackle must

have stuck. She'd made all the sound she wanted for one night. I kept on yapping. At least, I thought, it would keep me awake. No response.

"What," I asked, "is to prevent me from sticking you and then shoving you off this seat?"

No response. She understood my fumbling Arabic. That tell-tale flicker in the black eyes gave her away. But she'd made up her mind not to play my game. She just kept straight on with her own, eyeing me with that queer, fatalistic look so peculiar to her kind.

Curiously I was reminded then of a movie I'd seen while on leave in Tangier not long before. One of the characters had said to another: "So you won't talk, eh?" Only his was a comic yap, while mine was deadly serious. Besides, there's something about these brown women, when they start using their eyes, that makes 'em different from other women.

I used to think I knew quite a lot about women. I didn't begin to understand this one. Now that the hysterics and the aftermath had all died away, her face was absolutely composed. It might have been marble for all the movement there was in it. Only her eyes were alive. And that was my weak spot. I can't stand that kind of thing. Her eyes were just burning me up and I couldn't do a thing about it.

Sounds crazy. But I had to keep watching her. In my desperation to end that devastating silence I'd been berserk enough to talk of sticking her. That made her more alert—since she was not to know that I could hardly bring myself to it.

Whose move? That was the query that kept hovering around my mind. And I was beating back the ache to sleep. It was torture. It seemed as if she knew all about it, as if she were merely biding her time. For a breathless second I lost count. I pulled myself up with a jerk, sweating. It was enough to bring the beast to a halt. I kicked it into a lope again. That damnable expression of hers never changed.

It was entirely instinctive—the movement of self-preservation which flashed the knife. I don't know to this day what made me draw back.

At all events, the sudden action brought life into her brown mask of a face. She spat an ejaculation, a Spanish oath of such frightful cogency that it cannot be repeated, even in the original. Her lips curled back, much as an animal's might when trapped.

She talked hard enough, then or, rather, blasphemed. Speech tumbled out of her in a blighting cascade. The tongue-lashing was a natural reaction. The spell was broken. The explosion brought forth a flood of caustic vituperation from the maenadic creature.

So we railed at each other, mouthing vile oaths in bastard Arabic and Spanish, spitting and slabbering at each other like a couple of tiger cats. I was the son of a noseless mother and she a worm in the belly of a dog—according to the descriptive epithets of our respective tongues.

It ought to have been funny. It appears that way now. But the relief of that wild outburst was immeasurable.

That beast loped with nonchalant strides through it all. There was no audience in the nocturnal gloom, never the sound of a jackal. The mystic night was all ours in which to give vent to our brute passions. She had remained inarticulate for an hour of hell, wishing a knife out of my clutch. But the blade had flashed for a split second and burst the evil spell.

We spat till exhausted. We were loping at a snail pace. There was nowhere to go, no need for hurry. I wanted the dawn and a sense of direction. We drifted in silence. Suddenly sounds broke on my ears. The girl's head shot up, snuffling, peering through the gloom. I pulled the beast up and we waited.

Those sounds were coming nearer. It maybe that my pursuer was still around. I could feel the straining alertness in the girl's body beside me. In her face was a tense look.

I decided to stay put, drew the beast into the shelter of a giant cactus bush. No point in racing off again into the darkness. The other fellow would surely hear us. I held the knife in front of the girl's face, indicated that I'd plunge if she attempted a call.

The sounds drew nearer, the soft but unmistakable pad of a lone camel. We waited a thousand years, or so it seemed. I did not take my eyes off the girl's face. One hand clutched her waist-band, the other held up the knife. Moments stretched to their greatest degree of tensity. The girl sat still as a stone, black eyes alight, full-lipped mouth half-open as if arrested in the act of crying out. Every little feature is imprinted on my mind for all time.

If that fellow found us, I thought, I'd have to plunge, not to destroy, but to maim, to keep her out of action while I attended to the visitor.

Quite suddenly, without any sort of warning, she jerked her whole body towards me. I have still the horrible sense of blade scraping bone. Her action was deliberate, calculated to the second. As God is my judge, I did not plunge that knife!

I was taken unawares, rocked out of my seat as she tumbled into the dirt. We fell together. Her last action was to grasp at my hands over the hilt of the knife, as if she would drive it further home. Nor had she attempted to cry out. I was startled, mystified by this catastrophic dénouement.

Mechanically I wrenched out the blade. The blood gushed from her bosom. Choking sob. Brown face turned a dirty grey. She was dead, black eyes wide open and shining—or they appeared to in the strange gloom about us. Her ample body had sagged in my arms like a weighted sack. I guess I was stupefied for several long moments. The thing had been so sudden, so totally unexpected.

It took me a time to iron out that situation. I must have been crazy about that knife. Long afterwards I realised that, during the period when we were eyeing each other for hours on end, and her magnetic orbs played tit-tat-too with my nerves, it wasn't that *she* wanted the knife. She had watched me like that because of her fear that I might use it on her at any moment!

She had felt that her compatriot was drawing nearer. She may have believed my end had come. What other explanation is there for her crazy act?

I may have got it all wrong, but on reflection I can find no other reason for that deliberate thrust at the blade.

Not that I had much time to ponder just then. My pursuer had heard the sound of our crash into the cactus. I heard him padding towards the bush, jumped to my feet, blood-stained knife in hand. That was the tableau which met his gaze. Naturally he placed the wrong conception on what he saw. In his vision I'd just risen from murdering his chieftain's daughter.

He stared, bellowed, lunged. At the same instant my foot shot up and cracked his wrist. The knife went hurtling through the air. We closed, stumbled over the girl's body, went down in a heap. Then we went to it, tooth and claw. He was a powerful wallah and threw me with ease. But I had a bent knee, thrusting and prodding at his vulnerable parts. The trick prevented him from getting too close. While we scrabbled and struggled in the dirt he strived to reach up to my throat with his claws. Strangulation was his strong suit.

We fought with our hands, clawing at each other while my knee worked. If I could secure his thumbs I'd keep him off my neck. I guessed that might be one he didn't know. He hadn't any science. He was just brawn with a hellish determination to reach my throat. But it isn't easy to keep wind while working from underneath and with such a hefty wallah on top.

We scuffled and thrust about the dirt. The Berber was intent then upon breaking my knee. He didn't like its effect. I shoved, pressed with all I'd got.

He grunted. Stench of fetid breath. His scrub of black beard brushed close, too close. One had a distorted vision of baleful eyes, twisted features, bared fangs.

Over and over we rolled—till pulled up by the wedge of that girl's stiff body. But my knee was still bent, thrusting. I got a thumb. It was big and knotted, like the crook of an ash. I shoved against it with all my weight, back and back. He snarled. The animal was being hurt. His thumb was tough, big as a child's foot. I heaved, gasped with the effort. It was bent nearly double before it cracked.

He yelped with the sudden pain. If there was to be any neck twisting he'd have to do it with one hand. I wouldn't let up on the grip, but tore at the broken thumb, while he snapped and snarled like a mad dog. We tumbled and struggled about the scrub like a pair of ferocious beasts. There after an insane battling, a struggle to the death, brute passions uppermost, pitching this way and that. But I did not lose my hold on that broken member of his paw.

I had dropped my knife in that instant when we closed with each other. Excitement maybe. It was then when my foot found it again—his knife or mine. I fought on desperately, lungs labouring, striving to keep my hold and work around so that I might reach the knife.

There could be no quarter between us. It was his number or mine. Suddenly he had clamped his powerful legs about me, heaved. I seemed to rise in the air. I dropped a yard from him, my

skull crashing against that of the dead girl. The whole of my face went numb, entirely without feeling, by the shock of the impact; but I was a long way from being out.

He could not have bettered my position. I lay prone, groping for the knife. My fingers closed over it. My head was in the girl's lap and it was wet. The Berber approached cautiously. He couldn't be sure whether I were out for the count. I gripped the knife hilt firmly, tried to control my breathing.

The black shape of him hovered. Even then I could note that the first streaks of dawn were breaking up the violet gloom. His massive frame blotted the view. Dim shape of a brown claw reaching for my throat. On the instant that I felt the touch of his fingers I struck upwards, ripping his belly. He grunted like a stuck pig, hovered for a second, swayed on his knees, then slumped sideways into the dirt.

It was all over and I was all in. I lay there panting, between the dead girl and the dead man. That final thrust, that last effort had taken all the guts out of me. I hadn't strength enough left to shift my head from its gory pillow. And I didn't care. Nothing mattered. I was incredibly weary and sick as a dog. The reaction was a turning over of the stomach. Yet there was neither the will nor the power to move out of my dreadful couch.

I lay flat, gulping deeply, staring at the changing sky. Dawn over my eyes in a wide splash of brilliant colours. A brassy sky, a fire burning me up. My eyes were hot, aching. My head swam. Darkness descended in a complete black-out.

I must have slept for about five hours, rising stiffly, one solid lump of ache. It took several minutes to fit myself into that weird environment, to recall what had happened. The sun was well up. The whole world around was drenched in shimmering sunshine. It shone on two beasts munching camel thorn, on a giant, dust-laden cactus bush, on the crumpled shapes of a man and a woman. A strange world indeed.

Loot, thought I. Two camels—to say nothing of my bed chums. Maybe those beasts would find water. That was as far ahead as I could think just then. Water! Where in heaven's name could I find water? I stared round at the desolate waste. Patches of dusty scrub, patches of grey sand, beds of shifting stones. I stared at the giant cactus, an ugly creature rising to about eight feet, caked in dust, its thick leaves about a foot wide, round the edges of which were what looked like stemless, dirty yellow tulips—as if they'd been stuck there by some wag of the desert. It was part and parcel of the landscape, but how did these things grow in this dusty waste?

I unlimbered myself with difficulty, swayed on shaky legs, as full of cracks and clefts as this dried-up plain. Fair hair matted with dried blood. Her blood. Six-feet-two of helplessness. Water. That was all I needed. A mug of water, and I'd be as fit as an ox.

I walked over to the camels, croaked with relief. There was a canvas water bag hanging from the saddle of the Berber's mount. It could not have been fresh and it was probably reeking with germs,

but to me it was nectar from heaven. I was in clover. Astonishing what a drop of water will do for a man. There was a fistful of raisons and some flat bread in the saddle pouch. As a breakfast it served to revive my drooping spirits. The outlook was beginning to look more and more hopeful.

And then! *Nombre de Dios!* I saw a cloud of dust on the skyline. It grew bigger. Rolled on to the plain. No whirling sand-devil, but a band of horsemen. It came clearly into view, took shape. Soon I could distinguish the riders, their flying cloaks. They were advancing in extended formation. They had seen me. My knees gave way and I sat, wondering whether to laugh or cry.

CHAPTER II

SAND AND SUN

"You have been busy," said the officer—or words to that effect.

The band of horsemen turned out to be a squadron of Moroccan Cavalry, with a Spanish officer and an Italian sergeant in charge.

I stared at the monocled captain. He was typical of his kind. Most Spanish officers are proud, arrogant and brave. Nearly all of them are aristocrats, descendants of noble families, fearless by tradition. There is a definite line, however, between the distinguished military society of Spain and the class from which the rank and file are drawn.

Usually the rankers—case-hardened fellows of various nationalities, with a preponderance of Spanish, Portuguese, South American, German and, latterly, Italian members—were able to work in harmony with their officers, since every adventurer respects and admires courage in his superiors.

But too often these officers were more reckless than wise. They were steeped in medieval ideas. In battle they would be picked off like flies. Then the trouble would begin—as the whole history of the Spanish Foreign Legion shows.

This captain who confronted me had all the characteristics one had learned to expect. He was a big fellow, massive as to chest, which at the moment

was uncovered and pouring with sweat. He had a heavy, sensual face, and the rimless eye-glass seemed to be sunk in the thick flesh above the cheek bone. I remember I could scarcely take my eyes away from that half-sunken monocle. It was like a magnet.

The captain seemed to be under the impression that I had been fighting the Berber for possession of the woman, and he was curious to know how I came to lose the woman after all, since I appeared to have won the battle!

My adventures of the past two or three weeks, beginning with how our party from the outpost had been captured, and continuing through the vicissitudes of our wanderings right up to the break-away with the girl, took a dickens of a lot of explaining to that grandee with the monocle.

The more I talked, the less I liked the look of him. He appeared to think I was spinning a yarn. I began to sweat. He fixed me with his damned monocle—until I came to wondering myself how I had managed to do all I said I'd done!

A likely tale! That was all I got for my pains. In his view I was a swine of a deserter, and if I could not put up a better story than that when I appeared before my commanding officer—well, it would be just too bad for me.

I guess I flew off the deep end at that. I protested with some vehemence. I did more. I lost my temper, started to tell the one-eyed Window what I thought of him—and that tore everything.

I was placed under arrest. The captain rapped out an order. The Italian sergeant dragged me by the scruff of the burnous towards his mount. My

left wrist was secured to his bridle. The order was given to move off. I found myself trotting alongside the sergeant's horse.

The squadron, 250 Moorish Arabs, rode in front of me with the captain—and two riderless camels!—and I trotted behind while the sergeant amused himself with an occasional jerk of the bridle, coughing and spitting in the cloud of dust kicked up by the heels of the squadron.

My feelings can be imagined.

It was my first taste of this kind of punishment—though I had seen it. Years before I became a *Légionnaire* I had journeyed through the Tunisian desert. It was there where I came upon the famous *Compagnie Monte*, a fighting unit of the French Foreign Legion composed of the world's worst vagabonds, cut-throats and murderers, men who had proved themselves too tough even for the ordinary units of the French Foreign Legion.

This company was made up of about five hundred men and 250 mules—two men to a mule, one riding and the other running with his wrist secured to the bridle strap, riders and runners alternating in two-hour stretches. It was said of them that they could do sixty miles per day and keep up the pace for a week. In the main they ran themselves to death.

That day I knew precisely what it felt like to be a member of the *Compagnie Monte*. Only there were no two-hour stretches for me. It was all one stretch. Stretch is correct. I was dragged along, jerked and pitched along, by the side of that sergeant's mount for hour after hour, through the fierce heat haze of a blazing sun, while the sweat poured down my

body in muddy rivulets, and the choking dust filled eyes, nostrils, lungs.

That sergeant was greatly amused by my antics. He roared his guffaws. It was nothing to him that a fellow white man was being tortured and humiliated in the sight of comfortably-riding Arabs.

He, too, was typical of his kind. Of late we had been plagued by an increasing number of Italian sergeants in the Spanish Foreign Legion. They seemed to have flocked into the Legion after the Abyssinian War had ended, and they appeared to achieve the position of non-commissioned officers without any preliminary training or experience in the Legion. We were to learn the significance of this later.

I don't know how long I stumbled and staggered alongside the sergeant's mount. It must have been the better part of the morning—through the worst heat of the day. I know that when the order was given to gallop I pitched headlong, knew I was being dragged by one arm even as I passed out.

When I opened my eyes again I was sitting up against the wall of a blockhouse and water was being thrown at me by the pailful. Strange as it may seem, that dousing with cold water even in that brutal manner was delightfully refreshing. The squadron had dismounted. A number of Moors were standing about and smoking, indifferent to this display of how to revive a wretched Légionnaire.

The sergeant was about to swing another bucket when I jumped to my feet and dodged out of his line of fire. He dropped the bucket and lifted his foot. I contrived to dodge that as well. Then he

ordered me to march, which I did, up and down the parade in front of the fort, moving like an automaton in response to his orders: "March! Left turn! About turn! Right turn!"

And so on—while I swung round crazily in prompt obedience to command until I couldn't tell whether I were going or coming. It went on until the sergeant grew tired of bawling. Then I was marched across the yard of the fort and thrown into a cell. For a long time I was quite dazed with the blackness of that cell after the glaring sunlight outside. Then I slept.

I had three days of that cell, but as I slept most of the time, between meals which a grinning and not unfriendly Moorish orderly brought along, I guess that punishment didn't amount to much. Anyway, I felt fit enough when I turned out again. I was supplied with a ragged uniform, rope-soled canvas shoes and all, and thrown out into the square on my ear.

One-eyed Window informed me I was to be returned to my unit under escort. I was given a mount and accompanied by the sergeant and six of the native cavalry we started off. This was round about five of the morning. With steady riding we should reach my unit well before noon.

We kept up the pace, hard going over all manner of broken ground, for some four hours. Then we came to a halt in the shade of a patch of wood and dismounted.

I noticed the wop sergeant had been particularly quiet throughout the ride, and seemed content just to keep a wary eye upon me. In his view I was just

a Yank of a desperate character. He had not, however, attempted any more of his baiting. In fact he was not nearly so conscious of his superior rank as he had been. He doubtless appreciated the fact that in the sight of these half-dozen Moors I was as good as he.

The situation amused me intensely. I was at no pains to hide my amusement. When I chatted in Arabic with the Moors he seemed considerably disturbed. When one of them offered me a cigarette he showed his perturbation by ordering us to mount and get going. I retorted that we had but a few moments ago dismounted and preferred to rest a while.

We stared at each other then. It was quite a thrilling moment, a sort of battle of wills, with the Moors looking on. The wop tried loud-voiced bluff and bluster. That didn't work either. We just smoked and stared at him in silence. The fellow was beaten and he knew it.

He turned away, still blaspheming, and walked over to his mount. He fumbled busily with the saddle straps, the seven of us watching him. Rich moments! I was suddenly full of a strange exultation. I grinned. In those moments, weird creature that I am, I was happy, feeling adequately avenged for the humiliations and insults and brutalities he had bestowed upon me!

I guess it was just human to feel that way. It's an incontrovertible axiom that the bully is the biggest of cowards. The sergeant again ordered us to mount. I sat down, continued puffing at my cigarette. The philosophic, fatalistic Moors stared at nothing in particular.

Here we are, thought I, miles and miles from nowhere, two white men behaving like children for the benefit of these half-dozen "uncivilised" Moors. But I felt something ought to happen. This was all too tame for words.

Something did happen. But it didn't come from the sergeant. It came from a wandering band of Berbers, about a score of them, mounted, obviously out for game. We were as good as any.

When they hove in sight over a fold of the plains the wop suddenly got busy. We forgot all about our differences then. The hostile natives had seen us and were coming forward at the gallop. We turned our horses into the trees and secured them, crouched down on the fringe of the wood and waited.

I was a prisoner and unarmed of course. The sergeant snatched his rifle from the saddle bucket and handed it to me. He had his Mauser pistol, so we were quite happy. We were eight against a score, but we had the advantage of the rising ground and the shelter of the trees.

Those long-sighted natives had our measure, knew our strength. They came up at a swift gallop, announced their intentions with a flurry of shots. We had a pretty safe berth, providing we could hold it against surprise, for it commanded a good view of the countryside. Their only shelter were a few scattered bunches of scrub and boulders.

"Don't shoot till I give the command!" snapped the sergeant.

I could feel his excitement. For my part, I was in my natural element. I had been in the clutches of these Berber devils before. I wasn't worrying a

lot just then which way the wind blew. But meantime, it was good fun watching them come up over the rising mound.

I doubt if there is anything more thrilling—being keyed up like that, waiting for your meat to get breast-high, sighting on a native cummerbund. . . .

“Now!”

The sergeant opened with a neat one to midriff. A Berber toppled out of the saddle. A riderless horse started careering and kicking, bringing confusion to the advancing natives. The quiet morning air was suddenly filled with their yells, the crackle of fire and the screech of wounded horses.

The bunch pulled up sharply, dropped wherever they could for cover. A couple of their number were retreating with the mounts. The fight was on. Before our eyes shimmered the deceptive heat haze. Shots echoed eerily in that spacious wilderness. The Berber, in spite of his distinctive clothing, somehow contrives to make himself part of the landscape. It was astonishing how they were able to use those clumps of bush and stone for cover.

But occasionally one would sight the flutter of a burnous. Then—ping-oong in the still morning air, a yelp, and another had gone to Allah. Then a long, long wait. The Berber is the most patient of animals. He can stay put for hours, snuggled comfortably in the grey dust.

We had eight valuable horses. They wanted them. These fearless devils counted their wealth in horses. And what were eight Christian dogs, anyway? Our demise would assure them a seat on the right hand of Allah.

So they lay there, with never a sound, and scarcely a movement, hour after hour, while the sun blazed down and the day advanced. Staring through the burning heat haze for signs of the tiniest movement can be devilish painful after an hour or two. I can recall staring with a strange fascination at a swarm of flies and insects which hovered about the decomposing carcase of a horse. The intense heat had done its work quickly. Two vultures sailed over but made no attempt to drop. They are canny creatures. There were live men scattered about that dead horse and they knew the smell of a native rifle.

Shimmering heat haze. Buzzing flies. Dusty plain. Brassy sky. Eyes straining hour after hour to penetrate these myriads of tiny movements. Somewhere out there a number of Berbers were hidden, waiting for us to emerge, or maybe waiting for darkness to descend. For three solid hours there wasn't the slightest movement among them.

Then one of our Moors touched the sergeant. He jumped, bit off an oath. The waiting had strung up his nerves. The Moor pointed. At first we could not see a thing—save the buzzing flies and the spots dancing before our eyes. Then we saw a patch of dusty earth moving—*moving!* A grim shape of sand was inching its way towards us. It was uncanny. There was no sign of Berber, no hint of moving limbs or clothes. Just a moving mound of sand no bigger than a man.

The thing held our gaze for a fascinating space. The man was burrowing his way like a mole beneath the soft surface of the dusty plain. It was mystifying, frightening. I looked and looked, yet there

was no doubt about it. It moved. It had nothing to do with the heat haze shimmering over the sand—though it might well have been mistaken for that, if the acute vision of the Moor had not detected the difference of movement.

I held my breath, sighted carefully. The thing could not have been more than a couple of hundred yards away. I fired. A yelp. A cloud of sand and dust. A flurry of arms and legs. The figure flopped back into the dirt, lay still. I fired again, registering a hit. But the crumpled shape did not move any more.

"Save your ammunition," growled the sergeant.

We stared at the figure for a while. It was naked. The nose of a rifle protruded from beneath the body. The two vultures hovered. I shuddered. If one, why not others? We scanned every inch of ground before us.

In the ordinary way of campaigning, I do not much care what I face. This was different. Four or five such creeping figures and we should be potted off before we knew anything about it. For a space I was seeing all manner of moving shapes in that damnable haze over the sand. One does not need moonlight and moss-grown ruins to experience the uncanny. It can all be felt in the blazing sunshine of the desert. I have, I guess, a particularly strong aversion for the sort of thing. I'd rather face a hundred yapping natives.

For the remainder of that afternoon I stared into the breath of a furnace, sweating as much from fear as from heat. Dusk came. Still no movement. By the time the sun had gone we were reduced to a state of fearful anticipation.

Darkness descended like a dropped curtain. We spread ourselves out along the fringe of the wood. It was then every man for himself. We knew not from which flank the Berbers might emerge out of that darkness. Shots came over and spat harmlessly among the trees. We fired rapidly wherever the spurts of fire showed in the blackness—futilely, perchance, for it was clear that the Berbers were as rapidly changing their positions.

They drew nearer. It could not be long before they would rush our position by some crafty manœuvre which we were unable to anticipate. All day they had lain in the dust, waiting for this opportunity.

Luckily for us, however, they had waited too long. The moon suddenly opened up that dark world before us. We saw them then, creeping towards us in extended formation, a crescent of crouching forms. We opened with a rapid volley, shattering their flanks before they had time to drop for cover.

The ground grew gradually lighter. The advantage was again with us. We used our shot sparingly, waiting for movement. Once we had grown accustomed to the strange light shed by the moon, we found it easier to keep watch, detect movement, than it had been during the heat haze caused by the sun's glare.

But those devils out there were in no sort of haste. They had dropped back into the dirt again. It began to look as if they would stay there for hours. Our day's rations, more than sufficient for the journey we had started upon, were all but exhausted. We had not anticipated this sort of delay. It seemed

years since I had left my own unit. I began to think I should never get back to that dusty fort and the little village at the foot of the hill. . . .

The sergeant had crawled alongside and was suddenly gripping my arm, pinching in his agitation. I turned and stared at him. His face looked green in that light, emphasised by the black stubble round his chin and the startled look in his eyes. I squinted round in the direction of his pointing finger.

"It's gone!" he gasped.

I gaped. The dead Berber, the naked one who had tried to creep on to us under a mound of sand, had gone, vanished into the blue! The body had been spirited away. Yet none of us had seen it go. It had been removed from under our very noses and we had not known a thing about it. It could not have been done under cover of the darkness, for the Berbers had not advanced to that point when the moon showed up and they dropped in their tracks.

No. That dead man had been removed within the past few minutes, for I had seen the body lying there, seen it by the light of the moon. One had subconsciously made it a focussing point. Now it had gone!

"It didn't get up and walk!" I snapped, irritated by this new move. "They've dragged it away."

"But how? We should surely have seen them doing that!"

Of course. How in hell had they removed a body without being seen? A little more of this and I'd go plumb crazy. Well . . . how?

"Look!" I was croaking with excitement myself. "Isn't that a line—a sort of raised track shooting off from about where the body was lying?"

Four or five of us got the same idea in a row. We started peppering that raised, elongated mound of sand, concentrating our fire on it for several breathless seconds. The dirt was spurting up in all directions. We had our reward. A figure leapt out of the earth as if shot up by some hidden spring—another Berber had made the journey to Allah, also in his birthday suit.

It was a relief to see those flying arms and legs, watch them flop lifeless into the dust. I was beginning to get phony ideas about the strange disappearance of that dead body, and it isn't good to have the mind fussing around with supernatural ideas when you are in a tight spot.

I guess we were not so terribly outnumbered then. We must have accounted for ten or a dozen of them by that time. Just the same, we were not getting any forrader. Two or three well-hidden men could hold us at bay indefinitely, since we dared not crawl out into the open. We could make a charge. But how many of us would be left when we reached them? I guess that was what they wanted.

We did not even know where they were! The Berber is as stealthy as a cat, more cunning than a fox—as we had already seen—and an uncannily accurate sniper. This moon-drenched night wasn't so good after all. If they had been able to carry out that blind charge the odds would have been about equal—unless their eyesight in the dark was better than ours.

As it was, we were merely lying face to face without seeing each other, and nothing stirred. Why shouldn't this sort of cat-and-mouse play go on for days? It would take a day or two for the commanders of the two forts concerned to realise that something had gone wrong and send out a patrol to search. We might all be dead by then.

You can't keep these kind of thoughts back when you have nothing to do for hours on end but watch and wait, and keep on watching and waiting. In such conditions the night will stretch out in seemingly endless hours.

The Moors were all for making a dash into the open—which is typical of Moorish soldiers under Spanish training. They were paid to use guns and what was the object in holding your hand? I was inclined to accept the argument. A charge would be far less advisable on the morrow in the blinding sunshine.

The wop counselled patience. We should stand a better chance in the half-light of the early hours, in that space of time between the ending of a moonlit night and the breaking of a new day. So we watched and waited, crouching together in a bunch for company.

Hour after hour passed and no sound broke the eerie stillness of that night. We might have been alone in the world. The tranquillity was such that we could hear each other breathing. We would have welcomed the hideous howl of a jackal pack. None came. Nothing stirred out there.

Every bush and stone stood out in stark relief. The scene became unreal. It was like gazing at a

property set in a movie studio, with an artificial orange-coloured moon and not a single player in sight. No man slept except for a few fitful minutes.

We stared so long that eyesight became deceptive, seeing movement where movement was not. It is a weird sort of hallucination that must be experienced to be appreciated. We took it in turns to watch the spot where two had been accounted for, but without avail.

We knew every change in temperature during the passing hours, and we stirred, braced ourselves when we felt the cold, raw, drifting air which heralds the approach of another day. The moon began to tarnish. We got to our feet. The scene before us was suddenly streaked with peculiar strands of light and shade. There could be no question of our attempting a breakaway. Our mounts would be shot from under us before we could make it.

We had to go out there and finish off these troublesome Berbers. Then return for our mounts, which were still browsing safely within the shelter of the trees. The moon was obscured, blotted out. A pencil of light shot up along the horizon.

"Now!"

We raced from the trees in open formation. For the first exciting minute or two there was nothing but the pad and crunch of our feet in the thick dust of the plain.

Then a spattering volley of lead came over. It was too thin, too wide of the mark to check us in that blind rush. We returned the fire, shooting haphazardly from snap as we ran. We knew then

by the nature of the rapid fire that met us that there could not be many of the Berbers left.

They were firing as rapidly as they could eject the spent cartridges, but even so, it was too late to attempt any further deception. As we made towards their patches of cover, raucous cries of Allah! Allah! mingled with the snap and crackle of rifle-fire, and the Berbers emerged in a body to meet our onslaught.

There was not more than a dozen of them. Two hooded figures rose up from behind a clump of bush. I raced towards them, swung the rifle, saw the hood flop sideways from the fellow's head, heard the sickening smack on his pate as butt met bone.

Then, with amazing swiftness, the other was crashing his gun at my jaw. I swerved a split second too late. It seemed as if the whole of me tensed to meet the impact. But the downward sweep of the weapon was intercepted by the Moor at my side, even as it was within an inconsiderable inch or so of smashing me. The Berber's rifle clattered among the rubble at my feet. He followed.

Thereafter a bloodthirsty free-for-all, with the scrape and clash of arms at close quarters, the snarls and curses and yells of desperate men. A flurry of savage, black-bearded faces, vision of a twisted, lop-sided face, fierce, malignant glint of eye, a hideous grimace and a snarl of triumph as the blade drove forward, the yelp as the man's broken arm fell limp and the knife slithered into the dirt.

God! What a frightful mix-up! We were stumbling and staggering about the flint-strewn patch, thrusting, slashing, parrying and jabbing in all

directions. The Berber doesn't like such hand-to-hand blood-spilling. He much prefers the crafty sniping from his cunningly-concealed cover.

As we fought, the sun came up over the rim of the plains. The world was a splash of colour. It lit up a handful of madmen, blood-stained, wild-eyed men, cutting and thrusting at each other, an ensanguined, chaotic situation entirely without reason or motive, except that one lot of men were Christians so-called and the other lot were Moslems.

But I guess we were not thinking of motives just then. Only of our skulls and skins. We fought like men possessed of devils. Once I was brought to my knees through falling over a body and down came a rifle-butt. I rolled out of that as by a miracle. A dozen times I saw the end. Somehow one managed to keep going, dodging, side-stepping. . . . Wounded and dead lay underfoot. Then I could see only four of these ferocious Berbers. They were still beseeching the aid of old Allah, still throatily snarling their blasphemies.

It went on, that desperate, hateful scramble, hour after hour. The sun was well up. Through it all one was conscious of the molten gold that now filled earth and sky. And the half-dozen of us who were left were then bawling and shrieking at each other like some weird fanatics of another world. They were beating us to a stand-still, for there was only one of the Moors, the sergeant and myself left to face three of them in that last macabre dance of death.

"Come on!" croaked the wop, his breath coming in choking gasps, blood-smeared jowl thrust forward.

A swinging butt grazed my shoulder. I felt suddenly sick and weary and nauseated by this bestial orgy of killing. So far as I was concerned, it was but a matter of minutes. I couldn't hold on to my shaking nerves much longer. It is a ghastly moment when you know that your strength is giving out, that strive as one may there is no more power behind the will to combat. . . . With me the strenuous days that had gone before were taking toll. There are limits to human endurance. I slipped, made a terrific effort to regain my balance. But the fire had all gone out of me. I went down under a crashing blow. Then the blackout. . . .

I woke up in the middle of a hot afternoon, burning from head to foot, woke from a horrible dream of funeral pyres of which I was fully conscious but which I was powerless to escape. Some unidentified sense made me raise an arm. I stared in horror. It was bare! Panic-stricken, I heaved with all my strength, still full of the terrifying visions of burning pyres.

I rolled over in the hot sands, hands pawing at an uncovered body—my own! I realised suddenly that I was lying in the middle of the desert and that I was naked! For the second time in a matter of days I had been divested of all my clothing. I was really afraid then, afraid for my sanity. I dared not look around. My eyes were on the dust and I knew that if I looked up I should see them torturing poor old Kelton.

I guess I must have remained crouched like that for quite a while. It was the strange silence, the almost complete lack of sound that finally brought

clarity to my brain. Gradually it all came back. Much had happened since I last saw Kelton. . . . Much. . . I unlimbered then, body all hot and aching. A few yards away a vulture was feeding.

So they had left me for dead? That seemed to be the way of it. Everything gone—clothes, rifle. Those three surviving Berbers had won out evidently, taken all they could lay their hands on, clothes, guns, horses.

I gazed around, taking in the scene bit by bit. Picture of desolation. Stunted bush, dusty scrub, hot stones, grey sand that flayed the flesh. Scattered bodies of men and animals lay about, the men stripped or partially stripped. But there were no Berber carcasses on that patch of Barbary. Only Moors—Christian Arabs so-called. I counted them. Roll all correct. Not Spanish cavalry any more. Just so many crumpled shapes in the desolate picture.

At least they had some clothing. That naked thing over there, rump obscenely turned to the sky, would be the sergeant. God in heaven! Was I the only living thing in all this wilderness? The three Berbers must have scuttled hastily when they collected horses and loot. I wished then they had made sure of me. Years of campaigning hardened one to many things. But I defy the most hard-bitten to face a situation like that without emotion.

Water within those trees, I thought. I could drink, bathe. There were rags on some of the Moors—too poor for the Berbers to loot, but covering for a body that blistered under a pitiless sun. First, however, I must go over to that other white man and

shove the sand over his nakedness until I recovered sufficiently to attempt some sort of burial. I could hardly leave him to the vultures.

The birds did not move as I staggered over to where the sergeant lay. In a violent burst of anger I picked up a stone and flung it at the nearest scavenger. There was a sudden whirl of wings, a screech almost human. The birds rose a few feet, dropped again, continued the interrupted meal. They cared little for my presence. Maybe they knew that I was soon to join the others.

I dropped down beside the white man, pushed him over on to his back, then stared as if he were ghost, not body. He was not limp. He was not dead. I'd seen too many dead bodies not to know. Under my hand was the feeble beat of life.

I guess I was just a bit demented then. I was bawling at him, patting the bare shoulder, shaking him, yapping and mouthing all manner of idiotic things in my excitement. I was crazy with the knowledge that there was somebody else in this world besides the vultures and myself.

I turned from him abruptly, threw stones at the birds, kept them at bay while I tore clothing from the other wretched bodies. I wrapped some about the sergeant and some I placed feverishly about my own limbs. Then began the herculcan task of dragging, half-carrying my companion towards the belt of trees. I prayed that he would remain alive until I could get him to the waterhole. I never doubted that I could save him—providing I could reach the water.

I was on my toes then, exerting every ounce of

strength. Had he been a long-lost brother whom I adored I could not have put more will-power into that appalling effort. Forgotten then was all his brutal treatment of me. There was no hatred left in my make-up. He was another soul in this empty world. I was no longer alone! I would restore him to life. Together we would beat this damnable desert yet!

Bit by bit, labouring with panting breath every inch of the way, I drew him at long last into the shelter of the trees. I was trembling with agitation as I forced open his mouth and splashed in the cooling draughts of water, beat upon his hands, his face. I had forgotten my own raging thirst in those tremulous moments. He began to cough and splutter. His eyes opened.

He was alive! His cracked voice could be heard. He was striving with laboured spasms to say something to me. It came at last. He was telling me I should get six months in the calaboose "for this." Then I knew he would be all right. There wasn't much seriously amiss with a fellow who could volley crimson oaths like that.

Presently he grew calmer, began to take in the general shape of things around us. To do him justice, his apologies were as profuse as his curses. I guess he was feeling good that there were at least two of us left in the world.

I began to scout around after that. Those Berbers had very efficiently cleared up this patch of Barbary. The rags I gathered were hardly sufficient to cover our heated bodies, and there wasn't a single shoe of any kind anywhere. Our trekking would be in

bare feet. Three canvas water bags was the total sum of my findings. But they would serve. We refreshed ourselves at the pool. The sun was then sinking below the rim of the desert. Our plan was to sleep within the shelter of the tree belt until early morning, when, if no other solution offered, we would start the trek towards my headquarters at the little fort of Abdessa.

We were up next morning with the first streak of dawn. The only thing to do was to get on our way. There were no signs of food hereabouts. We hoped to come upon a patrol out in search of us. There was always that chance. So we braced ourselves with copious draughts from the waterhole, filled the canvas bags, and set out.

The air was delightfully cool then and we should have some four hours in which to make the pace before the sun began to worry us. We told ourselves that anything might happen in four hours. I guess we were anxious to turn our backs on that scene of death and desolation. And who knows—those Berbers or some of their brethren might return.

We must have presented a weird picture in that early dawn—dressed in filthy rags which hardly covered our blackened and blistered bodies, trudging through the thick dust in bare feet, our total possessions three canvas water bags.

Everything went well for a couple of hours. Then we became aware of the scarring of feet by grit and stones. We would have given anything for a pair of the rope-soled canvas shoes issued by the Spanish Legion, much as we were in the habit of blaspheming that inadequate footwear.

Another hour and we were staggering along like drunken men on feet swollen like puddings, cut, bruised and bleeding. We had torn some of the rags from our bodies to wrap about the feet, but they did not offer much relief. We were determined to push on.

The sun was climbing, gaining in strength. Still we plodded on, dragging one tortured foot after the other in a frightfully painful hop-skip-and-crawl. The heat was growing in intensity. We dared not halt. There wasn't a vestige of shade anywhere. To drop down into the sand now would mean a slow, agonizing death. We must stagger along until we could stagger no more.

Our heads were burned by the merciless sun, feet scorched and blistered by the baking ground. Still we trudged, shuffling drearily in and out of the thick grey dust. We would draw the bits of rag over our heads, only to have the heat beat excruciatingly on back and shoulders. It became a game, that alternating between back and head with a handful of rags.

Terror had us by the throat then. We were not the first men who had been lost in the desert. There was not a sign of habitation, not a patch of shade, no shelter anywhere over that heated wilderness. On and on we struggled, dropping sometimes from fatigue, but up again, the one dragging the other, only one thought then—to keep moving, keep moving.

A nightmare journey in the blazing sun. We had ceased to talk to each other. We staggered on in silence. Speech was beyond us. Our mouths were

too parched, tongues too swollen to utter further sounds.

The blasting heat of that brassy sky had brought us the other dread enemy—madness. It would have been so easy to drop into the sand from exhaustion, so easy to lose grip on one's sanity. I know that I wanted to tear at my aching throat, wanted to run around chasing the myriads of things that danced tormentingly in the heat haze before my eyes. I had the horrible fear that we were just trudging around in circles.

But we reeled on grimly. The pace was mechanical. Something other than ourselves kept us in motion. I would shade my eyes, with hands nearly black, to note the position of the sun. God! How we prayed for the end of that day. In our tortured vision it seemed as if it would go on and on interminably.

Until we saw that cloud rolling over the skyline. We did stop then, croaked a query or two. There could be no doubt about it, that was a party of horsemen galloping up over the rim of the desert. It was the last straw. We sank into the dust. These Berbers could have us for the taking. We had reached the limit of human endurance. We could do no more.

We lay there, panting with exhaustion, tongues swollen and blackened with thirst—for we had used our water freely in those first hours, never dreaming that we should be still trekking ten hours later. We were half-crazy with the torturing sun and the sand-grit in mouth, eyes and nostrils. We took but a feeble interest in that approaching band of



I AM MOST WELCOME SIGHT TO ALL DESERT TRAVELLERS
The water settles with his bullet, and I am

horsemen. After all our efforts . . . to end like this. The gods of fate must laugh sometimes.

I dropped my head into the dust, closed aching eyes. I wasn't interested any more. But suddenly the sergeant had struggled to his knees, his blackened arms outstretched. I thought at first the sand beetle had got him, that he had gone berserk.

A choking cry escaped him. His mouth was opening and shutting like that of a stranded fish. He was gesticulating madly. Then I saw that the party of riders were almost upon us, and—merciful powers!—these were no Berbers. It was a patrol of Moroccan cavalry with a Spanish officer at the head. I don't know now how I climbed to my feet. Sudden excitement, the enormous relief, had lent a spurious strength to the body maybe. I can recall waving my arms wildly, feel again the pain of those feeble cries. Then I dropped to the ground.

This was the patrol sent out in search of us. They had been out all day. We learned while we were frantically swilling water that the patrol had come upon the spot by the tree belt where we had fought the Berbers, and having seen what had happened to the native escort had started with the help of a sand tracker to search for the sergeant and his prisoner.

I cannot recall much of that ride to the fort of Abdessa. Most of the journey was spent in fitful sleep, rolling gently in a canvas stretcher slung on one of the beasts, the sergeant on one side of the mount and I on the other.

There was no relief for us with the coming of the evening breezes. The sun had got into our bones.

I knew sufficient of the East to recognise the symptoms of heat-stroke. And I knew then, as we jogged steadily along, that that must be our portion.

I was but dimly aware of what happened after that, had only a vague awareness of our arrival at the fort, and how we were carried to the stone sheds used for cases of heat-stroke. But I can remember the immense relief brought about by the treatment with cold wet sheets and pails of water.

The next thing I knew I was in dock. It might have been a matter of hours, or of many days. I could not then know. I knew only an amazing sense of relief from that nightmare horror of sand and sun. . . .

I was still in hospital, though on my feet once more, when the historic Pronunciamento was posted, that famous document which was the signal for the Revolt of the Spanish Foreign Legion in Morocco. That the whole thing had long been contemplated was obvious to everyone—after it had all started.

It was actually posted at midnight—Friday midnight of July 17th, 1936. I can see the excited Spanish orderly rushing in with the news that the revolution had begun, the Nationalists were taking over, which, to us, meant that the Generals were pinching Morocco so that they could run it in their way. This was a revolt of military bigwigs, not of disgruntled *Légionnaires*.

The *Légionnaires* would be expected to do the dirty work, of course. But for the moment it did not appear to have any effect upon the rank and file—except that the Spanish and the Portuguese amongst

us were working their jaw tackle even more strenuously than they usually did.

In that little out-of-the way fort of Abdessa we did in fact carry on with the monotonous round of parades and fatigues pretty much as usual. I know that my fellow Légionnaires were somewhat dubious about it all. One might say that they were always ready for a revolt, since they were always badly fed, badly clothed, and indifferently paid—it has always seemed to be the most difficult thing in the world for the Spanish Légionnaire to get the meagre pay due to him.

Perhaps the change over to Nationalist control would mean we should get our pay more regularly. In that case, it would not be a bad idea. But what sort of a revolt was this that had its origin in the military authorities themselves? Clearly, this was very puzzling, to the mere Légionnaire. When the boss himself revolts, what is likely to ensue in the ranks?

Nor are Spanish Légionnaires ordinary rankers. On the contrary. They are in the Legion because, in the main, they are unfit for any other sort of life. It would be polite to call them lovers of adventure. To such rascals, rough-housing of any kind is just meat and drink.

Yet, in the first few hours following the revolutionary Pronunciamento nothing out of the ordinary seemed to be happening. At least, not so far as we in Abdessa could make out. Our company commander had said it was merely a matter of changing over, it would be a bloodless victory for the Nationalists. A very tame sort of revolution.

All kinds of rumours were flying around, as rumours will wherever soldiers are gathered together. The first and really sensational being that the Commander-in-Chief of Morocco had been imprisoned and that Generals Sanjurjo, Franco and Martinez Anido had taken over. Well, as all the world knows, it proved to be true enough about General Franco.

We soon learned, however, that this was to be no bloodless victory. The first intimation of trouble came when we paraded in full marching order, ready to leave Abdessa. Our destination was Larache. It appeared the civil population there was objecting to the new form of government. The revolt was to prove a most bloody one indeed!

CHAPTER III

WOMEN OF THE DEATH SQUAD

LARACHE is an attractive port on the Atlantic coast of north-west Africa. Ordinarily it is a great spot for the tourists who "do" Morocco, being less than sixty miles from the popular centre of Tangier in the international zone. The town is an old Roman colony. It shows up clearly from a long distance against the blue of the sky, and with the breakers of the bar and the Lukkus River, the waters of which form a great lake, it makes a lovely picture.

A lot of the loveliness had been knocked out of it when we got there, however. The highways and byways were littered with stones and brickbats. Houses, cafés and shops were barricaded, windows smashed, roadways torn up. Strenuous fighting between the civilians and the army for possession of the administrative quarters in the new town was in progress. The crackle of rifle-fire and the staccato chatter of machine guns greeted us. Volumes of smoke from a fired building were shooting skywards. The dust and debris of battle could be seen belching above the roofs.

"Hey, buddy! These dagos are having a real war!"

My new-found companion was apt to be a trifle sardonic. He was a Britisher who went by the name of Jenkins and refused to be known by any other,

unless it were the abbreviation "Jenks." He was something of a world wanderer and had spent much of his life roving about the American continent.

He had a strange side to his queer character. Though he would readily admit his nationality, he hated to have anybody mistake him for a "limey." This wasn't all pose. He was tough. He had been in the Legion but a short time—but soon got out of the habit of using the word "dago"—having found his way to Morocco from Abyssinia.

In some ways he reminded me of poor old Kelton. I think that must have been why I so quickly cottoned on to him. He had the same stocky build, powerful shoulders, brown eyes, tousled head. And there was a satiric twist to his mouth—as if he'd no intention of believing the half you said.

He was, however, the right sort of guy to have alongside when there was trouble in the offing. Apart from the fact that we spoke pretty much the same language—and it was a joy to find a fellow who spoke one's own tongue in the midst of all this excitable Latin argot—there was that foot-loose, devil-may-care air about him that had an irresistible appeal.

He certainly showed his mettle in that encounter we faced on our approach to Larache. We had hoofed along the main highway towards the new part of Larache, and had hardly got to the outer confines of the town when we were pulled up by a shattering volley. An order was rapped out and we dropped in our tracks. A mob of civilians, all apparently well-armed, had suddenly emerged from the side alleys in a very business-like charge.

They came at us with a rush, determined, it seemed, not to allow these reinforcements of the famous Third Foreign Legion to join their pals who were so desperately engaged within the town.

"Gosh, Terry! Take a looksee at the women!"

"Loyalists," they called themselves. Like the men, they wore cartridge belts or bandoliers, carried knives and firearms. But they could yap louder than any of the men. Wild women they were, wild as they make 'em. Spanish women of course. But there were others—a mixture of Spanish and Moorish, and they were the real she-devils.

The Spanish, even more than the French in Morocco, believe in mixing and merging freely as the most permanent sort of colonisation. Maybe the Spaniards and the Moors aren't such distant relations as all that, since the Moors were driven from Spain. But the admixture to-day is hardly the kind of thing you'd introduce to mother.

There was no time for cogitation just then, however. The loyalists were beating along the road, yelling to us to surrender or be shot to bits. Moorish women joined the mob, with their knives at the ready, always willing to take part in the fray, no matter which side began it.

The din these viragos set up was deafening. Volumes of screeches that rose above the snapping of rifles sent the shivers along my spine. They were saying what they would do to us if we did not drop our arms. And what they said was crude in the extreme. Just the same, we used our arms in rapid volleys. After all, you can't talk to soldiers like that, not the sort to be found in the Spanish Foreign

Legion, anyway. We just put a bead on the bawling wenches and fired.

I guess my feelings were just a bit mixed then. Making war on women isn't a bit in my line. We had no option. Our job was to move this crowd and get inside the town.

Yet the picture of them sticks—with their funereal clothes, wild eyes, streaming faces ghastly pale, tangled black locks. Why do these types of women always dress in rusty black? I guess they experience so many revolutions of one sort and another in their short lives that they just have to be ready for this next funeral.

But the wildest fighters. One saw them topple in mid-scream, sink into the dust, clutching at stained blouse. Others came up and took their places. There seemed to be hundreds of them, and they could shoot. They certainly pinned us down for a hot space. I guess most Spaniards know how to use a gun—as well as a knife.

"Yeah! And I know what I'd do with you! You . . .! Mother of God! Dja ever see such women?"

The face of Jenks, close to my own, was streaked with sweat. He was pressing the clips as hard as he could go. I'd seen these women on the war-path before. This was his first experience of the kind. They had got into his gullet. He kept on puncturing his fire with volleys of curses anent these unnatural women.

"Somebody's mother, I guess."

"That hardly seems possible, Terry. Maybe they're just wild boys with skirts on."

Less than a mile away the blue of the Atlantic shimmered in the sun. Nature had produced a glorious morning. Man was making hell of it. That sun-drenched highway was a shambles. A little beyond, in the town itself, more fighting, more hatred and bloodshed. And all because one group of men did not agree with the type of government set up by another group.

But to me, there is nothing so terrible in the world as the woman revolutionist. With the Spanish, at all events, it is the woman who proves the more callous, brutal and sadistic. The average man is far less capable of offensive, revolutionary tactics. Once the spark has been applied, it is the womenfolk who keep the holocaust alight, they who spread the flames, they who make the biggest sacrifice.

I've slipped the Spanish Legion now, and I'm not going back. There's far too much petticoat terrorism in Spanish Morocco for my taste. Fighting is one thing. Sheer wanton blood-lust is quite another. In any Spanish trouble you can count on the women, indeed you cannot reckon without them.

Those of them who have lived and worked and had their being with the Moors in Morocco, existed, that is, very much as the natives do in the awful evil-smelling hovels they call home, appeared to have acquired a lot of that indifferent regard for human life which is characteristic of the Moroccan, whether he be Moor, Riffian or Berber.

These women are a breed apart. They are not to be confused with Spanish women of the mantilla, voluminous silken draperies and click-clacking heels—though even in this type the lust for blood is never

very far from the surface, as their presence at bull-fights will show.

Maybe they are more Eastern than European. There is little to choose between them and the pure Arabic type. I guess it is just this fact that is behind much of Spain's ensanguined history. For the Spanish revolt in Morocco began in much the same fashion as scores of other minor revolts in Spain itself. I am fairly certain that no man expected it to spread as it did, like a prairie fire, right through Morocco and across the Mediterranean, and throughout Spain in the most frightful revolution ever known even in that land of blood and fire. And it was the women who kept it aflame, the women of both sides, nationalist and loyalist.

No one who saw them that morning at Larache could doubt their power. They were urging their men on in the game of spilling blood in terms that even a trooper finds distasteful on a woman's tongue. There has been a lot of talk about the torture of prisoners during this revolt. Most of it was true. But it applied to both sides in the crazy conflict.

When these women yelled at us that we should enter Larache only over their dead bodies they spoke truer than they knew. There were scores of the black figures lying on that road when we made the charge. And as we rushed the mob back and back, stumbled among the dead and wounded, our Moroccan troops took the most bestial advantage of the occasion.

Thereafter hell was let loose in the streets of Larache. Troops smashed their way into homes, wrecking, plundering, slaughtering, looting and woman-baiting to their hearts' content. It is one

thing to start a revolt and altogether a different matter to keep it in control.

We came up against the barricades then. Patrolling the streets in detachments, we would round a corner only to meet sudden volleys of withering fire that flattened us against the walls for cover. From behind the barricades men and women alike would pour blasting shot from every conceivable type of firearm. I saw *Légionnaires* with their thighs peppered with pellets carrying on until they could reach the comparative safety of a broken archway. Then they would squat down and start to pick the bits and pieces out of their legs with a pocket knife.

The necessary exposure of such treatment had its humorous side—for the other fellow. These men of the *Legion* could joke and swap badinage while waiting for the signal to rush a barricade. He's a queer animal, the average *Légionnaire*. The vaunted French Foreign *Légionnaire* had nothing on these Spanish troopers. Man for man, they could beat the lights out of any other campaigners. Ill-fed, badly clothed, rarely paid, they were just tramps among soldiers where only the fittest survive. And like the Moroccan troops alongside whom they fought, theirs was the philosophy of fatalism too.

Those barricades, however, were the very devil to break through. In some cases, such was the blast of fire from behind them, we could not approach within six or seven hundred yards. Then we had to climb the buildings nearby, under a hail of lead, in order to get at those behind the bulwarks.

I recall one such scene very vividly. Behind the pile of tables, chests, baulks of timber, stones and

sandbags, lay a bunch of men and women, blazing away at everything in sight along the street. In the midst of that queer crowd, in full command, as it seemed, was a great hefty woman, grey-haired, yellow face seamed and lined by the ravages of time, the black-clothed bulk of her humped over the sandbags, a long-barrelled native rifle at her shoulder with every blasting explosion.

She saw us on the flat roof, trying to make our way along for a closer target. Up came the grotesque piece of armoury. Her whole frame, powerful as it was, shivered and shook each time she fired the gun. It was almost comic. One couldn't help wondering which would prove the tougher, the woman or the gun. It exploded like a canon and she grew blacker and blacker in the face.

"It would be an act of mercy to put that old biddy out of her misery," quoth Jenks.

I noticed he never attempted to make the old woman his mark. He wasn't that sort of soldier either. But for quite a long time the weird creature occupied our attention. There was something terribly fascinating in the way she handled that unwieldy firing piece. Time after time she levelled it straight at us, fired, filled the air with volumes of black smoke and spraying shot. I guess it was just one of those firearms that had been in the family for donkey's years.

But there was no doubt about her attitude. She had been waiting for this a long time—and said so in terms of a sanguinary nature!—and she was determined to pay off a number of old scores, such as taxes and things, for which the troops in Morocco were

indirectly responsible. She certainly brought a pleasant and entertaining lull into the business of killing.

She sat back on her haunches with the ancient piece across her knees, re-charging, and while thus engaged would break off suddenly to appease her hunger by tearing huge chunks off the fistful of meat she had in her lap.

"And there ain't one of these damned dagos dare put a bead on her," chuckled Jenkins.

Which was true. There must have been fifty of us on that roof—Spanish, Portuguese, German, Italian and South American—yet we aimed at every other target down there except that grey-haired, bovine creature with the long-barrelled gun.

There was an amusing interlude when the old woman's attention was drawn towards a little rat of a man who appeared too anxious to keep himself under cover. The little fellow wore huge brass earrings, which became his undoing. For the elephantine one suddenly shot out a brawny arm, hooked a gnarled finger into one of the earrings and dragged him into the fray.

That target was really too good to miss. Half a dozen of the fellows promptly aimed, fired. The little wretch slumped back into his funk-hole riddled with bullets. The old woman looked up, let off a volley of screaming curses, levelled her gun and blasted another round of shot into the air.

A score of *Légionnaires* ducked behind the parapet of the roof, guffawing as if they would burst. To them the incident was extremely funny.

We must have lain there for the better part of an hour, picking off one by one Madame's little force of

loyalists. It was weird watching them flop down among the debris of stones and timber and sandbags, women as well as men, while the old she-devil remained. But soon she was alone there with her dead and dying.

Then she climbed on top of the barricade and stood there defiantly, a great and grotesque bulk, waving her arms and screaming, a terrifying figure to any man. Not a shot was fired in that street then. The whole area was suddenly filled with the wild creature's shrieks of defiance. She was yelling to the troops to come and get her—if they could. For appreciable minutes she held up the whole force!

The gnarled old-timer was boss of the situation. What a magnificent general she would make, I thought. But she was on the wrong side of the barricade. Amusing to see how all those hardened troops in the street below had hesitated, wondering what they should do about this towering menace.

Then came the order to clear the street. A bunch of *Légionnaires* rushed forward. There was a blasting explosion from her gun. When the cloud of smoke rose we saw a score of them dancing around the woman, trying to dodge the whirling butt of her rifle, while others were busy breaking away the barricade from under her. No one appeared to be hurt by her shot.

In a few moments the barricade gave way, clattered into the street, carrying the gallant old dame with it. The *Légionnaires* pounced upon her as she struggled to free herself. That was the beginning of the end of her.

I felt a bit sick when I saw them strapping her great bulk to a balk of timber. They reared it up so that

she stood upright. Ten men were lined up. The order was given to fire. Even as she went out, the baulk of timber swayed, dragged by her weight, and fell into the street with a crash.

After that we descended to the street and swept it from end to end with bullets. Men, women and children were dragged out of the hovels and thrown into the street—prisoners of war and treated as such. The pitiful wails of those children and the shrieks of the women ring in my ears now. There isn't any sort of warfare so horrible as this.

We spent the whole of that unforgettable day in clearing the area that had risen against the new order of things. It wasn't nice. It seemed that no female between six and sixty was taboo. Spaniard and Moor and the offspring of these were all lumped together in that frightful round-up of loyalist prisoners. This was the grand opportunity for Légionnaires and Moroccan troops alike to freelance up and down the narrow, twisted streets, in and out of the homes of the people.

Turn a body of such callous troopers and mercenaries loose in such conditions, and what is likely to ensue? The excuse was a search for arms, ammunition, and anything else that would incriminate a man or a woman. The scenes that occurred in some of those dark, fetid hovels were beyond description. The resistance of the Spanish and half-bred Spanish women, the appealing cries of girls hardly out of the childhood state—these are the things remembered long after the mere fighting has finished.

By evening of that awful day there was no more

fight left in the men and women who had attempted to obstruct the new regime. And with the dark hours freebooting went on apace. Troops ran amok in the town. There was no order, no sense of discipline among them. The orgy of bestiality must run itself out. Here were the conquering heroes. They behaved as conquering heroes nearly always do in such conditions.

That night the native quarter was full of troops—Spanish regulars, *Légionnaires* and Moroccan levies. It was a night of carousal. Women and girls, many of whom had been on the side of the loyalists during the day, spent most of that night feasting and drinking with the ragged heroes.

Jenkins and I found ourselves in the company of a group of men of the Third Legion, rolling along the byeways, looking for pleasure—or trouble. We found both. Plenty. Everybody was making merry. We played, friend and foe, as recklessly as we had fought. Still with no thought for the morrow. What levy or *Légionnaire* thinks of the morrow, anyway?

After we'd had the feed-bags on—at the expense of any householder who couldn't resist—we sought wine. There was a special concoction in the stink quarter called "An Earthquake." It was made up of equal parts of cheap Spanish wine and Pernod. The effects of this vintage certainly did not belie its name. As Jenkins expressed it, we were soon all lit up like Christmas trees.

We swaggered the rounds of café and wineshop, and ended up in the noisiest and foulest of all the dives. The place was packed with roystering men and hilarious girls. It reeked of tobacco smoke,

wine dregs, and sweating humanity—an effluvium that sickened and soured the atmosphere. Girls everywhere had left behind all sense of decency—supposing they ever possessed any—and were then busily engaged draping themselves over the stained and ragged uniforms of the soldiery. One had to be very fuddled to accept it all without nausea. One was very fuddled.

This, it seemed, was the inevitable aftermath of the day's orgy of blood and slaughter, a natural reaction. The quickest way to forget the scenes and episodes of that gory day—the pictures of crying children, of streets littered with broken bodies, of demented women struggling in the claws of crazy men, of a giant of a woman trussed to a baulk of timber, body riddled—was to soak in spurious wine and keep on soaking.

What would you?

Rowdyism was the order of the night. There were free fights, free competition for the more appetising of the ladies, free feasts, free drinking—in fact, everything was there for the taking, and no man dared say nay to the conqueror.

A drunken Légionnaire slouched against a wall while a girl threw knives around his head. She seemed to have the knives secreted somewhere at the back of her neck, and the draw and the flip through the air was just one slick, lightning movement. Very neat. If she had holed him in one it would have been entirely his fault, for the fool could not stand still.

Then the floor was cleared of those who had been indulging in hugging set to music because a couple of the more obstreperous women were determined to

fight out their differences there and then. They were egged on by the ring of revellers. As they were only Moorish girls the fight between them was taken as a matter of course.

They went at each other like tiger cats. Prowess was a matter of honour in this quarter where women nearly always took the initiative in battle. They clutched and clawed at each other until the crimson flowed. It was not pretty. These two fought like animals in the jungle—for the right to reign. They tore at each other until stripped to the waist, until the black tangles of hair came away by the fistful.

Meanwhile the ring of spectators roared their applause of first one and then the other. Men called the odds they would lay or take on this and on that. One might have been pardoned, in that fuddled state, for mistaking the affair for a negro prize bout. I certainly would not have cared to stand up to either one of them. They frightened me. There was something terribly abnormal about these creatures with their crooked talons.

Other Moorish women looked on fixedly, breathlessly, with the light of that strange lust in their glistening black eyes so peculiar to the breed. It was only the Spanish women and the half-breeds who were vociferous. They yelled themselves hoarse, danced with excitement.

Somebody threw a couple of knives into the ring. They stuck in the floor near the hopping feet of the combatants, and were ignored. These two apparently had no use for knives. Maybe they were outside the rules. Tooth and claw were their weapons, especially claw.

I have seen a lot of fights up and down the world, some of them between women, but never one so ferocious nor so execrable. One of them went down in the end, after the bitterest struggle, with eyeball exposed. She was quickly bundled out of sight. No one knew where she went, what happened to her. Nor cared. The dance was on again. The wine flowed. There was music in the air—violins and accordions—to stir passions already overheated.

Those musicians tore off a lot of tunes that night. They must have been there in relays, for the carousal went on until dawn, until the boys and girls dropped in their tracks, arms about each other, and slept the sleep of the exhausted. Others retired, returned, retired again. What a night! What a sight! What a dawn!

We were rounded up in the half-light and marched off to the hospital. The Military Hospital of Larache is an ancient edifice in an excellent state of preservation, with massive towers battlemented and pierced with loopholes. It commands a wide view of the city. There we were to be stationed for the time being.

The following day was fairly quiet. The sun rose over a city that had taken its lesson to heart—to all appearances. Men went back to their normal occupations of bartering and buying, industry opened up again. The people buried their dead.

From our vantage point we could see for miles across the city to the shimmering hell in browns and greys beyond, or seawards to the lovely blue of the Atlantic, or immediately about us to the ancient fortresses—the Castle of Storks which surround the

Kasbah and overhangs the Lukkus River. The Larache beach stretches along the northern bank of the estuary and is reached by native ferry boats. We decided we'd make for that lovely spot as soon as opportunity occurred. Jenks was of the opinion that it promised a lovely swim.

I wondered, with aching head, why people went mad in surroundings so painfully lovely, why these terrible expressions of hatred and bloodlust? There wasn't any answer. Folks are just built that way, I guess.

We were not relieved until late afternoon. There was then no chance to reach the beach before dusk. Jenkins and I wended our way towards the Suks (native bazaars). Always life and colour there.

We were at home as soon as we merged with the gesticulating, multi-coloured, chaffering crowd. This was the real East, the fascination of colour and movement which draws the world wanderer. It was as far removed from the bestialities and atrocities of yesterday as Baltimore is from Baku.

It has always been a source of amazement to me to note the dexterity with which these people of Maroc can drop the gun and take up their peaceful daily pursuits. Here they were, chattering and chaffing among themselves, giving each other the Peace of Allah, crying their wares.

Silversmiths were squat at their craft, fashioning delicate and intricate vessels and trinkets. Makers of the famous yellow Moroccan sandals sat industriously working with needle and thread. The ancient and learned letter writer was back in his own particular corner. The water seller with his streaming goatskin

filled to bursting point with table water and his tinkling brass bell made a dripping path for himself. Fruit and corn lay about in abundant piles. The butcher—his meat black with flies as usual—the baker of flat, unleaven bread, and the maker of fancy candles for the mosques were all happily busy once more.

In the cafés a conglomeration of customers talked of yesterday while they drank cheap wine, mint tea, lemon and pomegranate, beer and even stronger potions.

Moorish women of the strict Moslem faith, in voluminous wrappings of unbleached wool and veiled to the bridge of the nose, revealing only sparkling black eyes, strolled leisurely and contentedly through this peaceful world. Unveiled girls with impudent mouths and flashing orbs, hips swaying in close-fitting black, jostled us good-humouredly. Slim Spanish youths with enormous brass ear-rings and curly black hair, ogling and posturing, murmured of delights to be seen and experienced.

We sat in the verandah of a café, indulging in a "hair of the dog," and watching with never-palling interest this seething ant-heap of colourful movement.

Jenkins plucked at my arm, nodded towards a figure that loomed head and shoulders above the jostling throng. It was the captain of Moroccan cavalry who had found me with the dead Berber and the dead daughter of a chieftan, the powerful-chested hulk of a man whose monocle was sunken deep in the thick flesh above the cheek bone.

"Bit of a tough wallah, I'd say," commented Jenkins.

The "tough wallah" turned his head at that precise moment, stopped and stared, then strolled over. We climbed to our feet and saluted. The captain motioned us to be seated, joined us. I stared at the bit of glass stuck in his heavy jowl. It looked as if it had always been there and always would be, as if he washed, slept with it there. The darned thing fascinated me no end.

I wondered what he wanted with me. He wasted no time in getting to the point. He had heard all about the episode of the Berber bandits out of which his sergeant and I had crawled with hardly a stitch to our backs. His Italian sergeant was dead, killed in the skirmish yesterday. He was looking for just such a man as I. He said other things which don't matter.

I had no objection. But I had grown to think a whole lot of Jenks. I wanted him alongside. The captain had room for him too. He would see about the transfers. There was more trouble in Arzila, a few miles along the coast. We should hold ourselves ready to report by the crack of dawn to-morrow. It certainly promised more fun. Even native cavalry would be better than hoofing all over the place.

Meantime, there was a whole long night before us. We left the café and started to prowl. Lights were beginning to appear about the open-fronted shops, the shabby booths and stalls. That hour always seems like a ragged sort of imitation of fairyland to me.

We decided we'd like to hear Moorish music and watch the dancing boys. An urchin in a comic collection of Arabic and European clothes guided us through the labyrinthine alleys and tunnels of the stink quarter. We stumbled along the unpaved lanes, passed dark

hovels dimly lit by feeble glimmers. Stench of garlic, mint, mutton fat, kerosene oil, decaying garbage, primitive drainage. In some parts complete darkness. Mysterious figures flitted noiselessly through the gloom.

These were native quarters, but Spaniards who had sunk low enough were not excluded. Here they lived and multiplied in all the filth and scum of the lowest native life. At a lighted doorway we came upon one such mixed family. We were invited to enter, declined, not being drunk enough.

At another corner there was a little tableau which somehow sticks in the memory. A Spaniard slouched against the wall too intoxicated to move and a small group of Arab children danced around him, tickled to death by his inebriated antics. The true Moslem does not drink intoxicating liquor. To these native children this specimen of European progress was a great source of entertainment, a figure of fun at which to scoff and jeer.

Our so-called guide remained behind to join in the fun. Perhaps it would be more true to say we gave him the slip. After that we wandered. Wandered is correct. Very soon we got the impression that some denizen of the sinister quarter was trailing us. We rather enjoyed that for a while—up one dirty alley and down another, ducking under archways to give the mysterious one time to slink by, then turning back on our tracks.

It all sounds crazy to me now, but it was good fun while it lasted. When we grew tired of the trail we rounded a corner suddenly, pulled up sharply, flattened ourselves against the wall, waited. The

fellow walked straight into a couple of fists. A knife flipped through the air as his arm was knocked up. We closed with him. There was hardly a sound in that dark alley, only the scuffle of feet in the dust and panting gasps. We left him in a neat bundle, took his knife as a souvenir, passed on.

By this time we hadn't a notion as to our whereabouts. Every twisted alley looked the same to us. We hoofed around for a while, then approached a lone figure to inquire our way. The old crone gave one glance at us, squealed, then took to her heels, slipping into the gloom as if she were a wraith.

"Say, buddy! What's the matter with a couple of Légionnaires, anyway?"

"I guess the old dame wasn't taking any chances."

"First, the darned apache wants to knife us for our dough, if any; then an old dame of ninety-nine thinks we want to manhandle her. This is some spot we're in, Terry."

"My sentiments precisely. Come on. Let's keep moving."

It must have been elevenish by then. The night was wearing out and we hadn't even begun. There was nasty work ahead to-morrow and we felt we had to get warmed up for that. We saw lights ahead and made for them. Presently we drew near a lighted doorway. Sounds of revelry from within. A bunch of girls invited us to enter. Any port in a storm. We went inside.

We explained patiently and carefully that we were looking for the café where the Moorish music was played, where the boys danced. The girls were tickled to death. We had come to the very

place. I doubted it myself. Just the same, they insisted that here was the real Moorish music, the dancing boys—and girls, also the Sudanese dancers. And what more could two Légionnaires at a loose end wish for?

We were led down a passage, across a courtyard, and into the building proper. Climbing some steps we found ourselves on a balcony that overlooked the yard or patio. This balcony ran round the inner shell of the building, and there were all manner of queer, mysterious-looking alcoves leading off it. Sounds of voices, trills of laughter came from behind the curtained arches. We considered ourselves well lost.

Traversing a dim corridor we came at last upon a large room. A dozen musicians seated in a bunch in one corner of the place were scraping with vigour at the weirdest types of string instruments—and creating an appalling din. This was Moorish music, we were assured. It had no relation to music as we in our western teachings understood the term.

Men were squatting on rugs placed by the walls. The centre of the floor space was cleared for the dancers. We were served with sickly sweet mint tea in small glasses and long cigarettes which tasted, and smelt, as if they had been made from garbage. Presently the musicians, in addition to their painful scrapings, set up a wailing and mournful dirge. It went on for an interminable period, then ceased with a sudden twanging snap of strings.

There was a roar of applause when the drums started and the Sudanese dancers rushed in to take the floor. There were six of them, all fine muscular

fellows, their hides shining under the canopy of lights like polished leather. Theirs was acrobatic dancing of a very clever order. Despite their giant build and unusual breadth of torso they were astonishingly supple, throwing themselves about the floor in a series of rhythmic leaps and tumbles that was good to witness.

The dancing boys were an altogether different bunch of trouble. One very soon had the impression that they were no better than they ought to be. They wore diaphanous gowns reaching to the ankles and belted at the waist with a girdle of gold threads. It was their only garment. Their tactics were different from the Sudanese. Instead of throwing themselves about, they scarcely moved their feet, the "dancing" being a series of abdominal contortions and back bending which one had to admire for its extraordinary poise and balance. The effect, in that filmy apparel, was certainly arresting, if somewhat nauseating, and may well be left to the imagination.

After them came a Moorish Arab who sang songs in his own patois that made everybody roar with laughter. I inquired of a Spanish youth seated near me what it was in this singing that made everyone laugh so heartily.

"Of men and women in bed," quoth he, the tears streaming down his face.

"We had gathered as much," snorted Jenks. "But what's so funny about that?"

The youth, however, was in fits and too absorbed to pay any further attention to us.

"Tame," grunted my companion. "Tame as

CHAPTER IV

SUZANNE

As soon as the white girl had finished her dance we left the hall of glittering lights and made our way towards the exit. We did not, however, get any further than the balcony when we ran into the strange creature in the company of another girl. The two invited us to partake of wine in the seclusion of one of the curtained alcoves. We did not refuse.

That was how we found ourselves in a small room with curtained walls, settees piled high with cushions, tinkling glasses, low octagonal table. Apparently the show we had seen was merely a preparation for a visit to these tiny retreats on the balcony. We could hear voices and laughter coming from the other alcoves. Trade, it seemed, was brisk.

Altogether it was about the sort of entertainment we had been searching for. Only it did not work according to plan. At least, not my end of it.

True, the minx who might have dropped out of Broadway or Piccadilly Circus, had parked herself on my knees. But she talked in French, and almost with the first syllable I knew she was no Parisian child. I challenged her. She swore, continued to chatter in French. The first round was a battle

of wits. She was bitter enough, but gave way in the end and began to talk in English. She talked a lot, but conveyed precisely nothing.

By that time I was thoroughly wound up. The more she refused to talk about herself, and her presence in that unsavoury dive, the more persistent I became. Soon we were snapping at each other like a couple of fishwives. She wanted to know why in *hades* she should explain herself to every Dick, Tom and Harry who happened along.

Jenks seemed to have his hands full with the other girl—a regular animal type from the Riff, with full red lips, wide nostrils, honey-coloured, tall, graceful of contour, lithe as a panther, black-haired luminous, kohl-darkened eyes, a rather wonderful specimen of the type that had probably trailed into town on the heels of the Legion. Neither she nor Jenkins took the slightest notice of my companion and me, or our stupid bickering. We might not have been there.

“What is your name?”

“Suzanne—but you wouldn’t believe it.”

“Sure! Brought up in a French convent, I suppose?”

“Oh, stow it! Let’s have another drink.”

“I’ve had enough drink. . . . What made you leave London for a hole like this?”

“Who’s funny story are you? Listen, soldier. D’you want me, or d’you just want a pathetic tale—about how I left London with a dancing troupe, got in tow with a wealthy native, took to dope and drink and gradually sank lower and lower?”

"It's a good old story, but I wouldn't be surprised to know it was true in your case. You look every part of that tale."

She was drinking hard. We had a silly fight over the bottle. Her speech thickened. Soon, thought I, she'll be in a rare condition to talk. Maybe my persistent questions had disturbed her. She was doing her damndest to get tight. I guess she had a whole lot of things to forget. And this guzzling was something more than a habit.

"Why don't you try to get back home before it's too late?"

"Home!" she shrieked. "You talk to me about home. . . . Blast you!"

Her eyes were lit up, the pale face flushed. She was trembling with rage, drunken rage. She started to struggle. I refused to let her go. She had all the impotence of a child.

"You damned Yank! Leggo! If I'd known. . . ."

"I see. You mistook me for a Dago?"

She sank back exhausted, lay in my arms, trembling from head to foot. I guess it didn't take much to knock her over. Then she started to cry. Just like that. All sloppy sentiment on the big man's shoulder. It came tumbling out then—all the sordid, miserable story. In four months she had made the descent from heaven to Gehenna.

The room was suddenly very quiet. I didn't see anybody then, didn't know that Jenkins had dropped everything, so to speak, and was listening to the girl's story. After all, it was a bit unusual to sit in a place like that and listen to an English girl telling how she came to Morocco on a tour only four short

months ago and how she had met her fate in the glorious white city of Tangier.

She and a girl friend had planned to tour French Morocco, but her meeting with a Spanish officer on leave, with money to burn, rather altered plans. She and the officer did the tour together, the girl companion refusing to leave Tangier. It seemed that the officer made rapid headway. By the time Suzanne and he had reached Marrakesh in the shadow of the Atlas they were using one name, the officer's, wherever they stayed.

Thereafter a round of gaieties, sight-seeing, a sampling of every sort of questionable dive, of every kind of thrill and sensation—including dope. Then, towards the close of the officer's leave, the inevitable quarrel and parting of the ways. Suzanne found herself stranded in Larache. Her ideas for the future were a trifle vague. She knew of only one way to earn money—by dancing. Hers was an expensive mode of life. She hardly earned money enough to buy food because so much of it was then spent on drink and dope—more especially dope.

She must have been a pretty little thing those few short months ago. Now she was terrified of the idea of going back home. Tangier was only sixty miles away. The American Mission would have seen to her safe conveyance there. Then she could have thrown herself on the mercy of the British Consul. Tangier is but three days' sail from London. She preferred to hide herself in this dirty native den.

Jenkins and I did our damndest to waken her out

of this sloth of degradation. She was more obstinate than a mule. Dope, we guessed, was behind her desire to stay put in this crazy spot. We pleaded, begged, prayed, cajoled, cussed and blasphemed, but all to no purpose. She believed she was sunk. We couldn't make her see otherwise.

We threatened to carry her off forcibly. After all, she was white and young and English. She was consorting in the lousiest kind of native dancing hell.

I guess there wasn't anything particularly chivalrous about either Jenks or myself. We had had about all the liquor we could hold. But even so, the idea of leaving the kid there sort of got us by the throat. I kept thinking of that little white thing . . . making love . . . to all and sundry in that Oriental underworld.

Something had to be done. But what? The little fool was just as determined to stay in the hell she had made for herself.

The Riff wench was reclining animal-fashion on a settee in the further corner of the room. She seemed faintly amused. Though not understanding our lingo, she had a pretty shrewd idea as to what it was all about. She just stared with those damnable, enigmatic eyes, saying nothing.

Jenks suddenly swung round on her, jerked his thumb towards the curtained entrance.

"Beat it!"

The Riff knew not the meaning of his words but his attitude was enough. She went.

We concentrated on Suzanne. She was terribly distraught, big brown eyes restive, baby mouth

shattered. The whole soft prettiness of her seemed crumbling too abruptly into old age. Her feeble efforts at defiance were pitiful. I'd give her a year in this hole, then lingering death.

"Who was this Spanish guy, anyway?" queried Jenks, for want of something to say.

"No reason why you shouldn't know. You'll probably meet him. Captain Fernando."

Meet him! Jenks and I stared hard at each other for a space. That name struck like a blow. We had already met him—the guy with the sunken monocle! The fellow we were to accompany on the trek to Arzila in a few hours! Tough. I guess there wasn't much he would hold his hand for. It must have been a hell of a tour—that hefty wallah showing the little girl things that no little white girl should ever see. That name put a different complexion on the whole story.

There was silence in that dimly-lit alcove for long minutes. There didn't seem anything to say. We were thinking very hard just then. That giant of a fellow and this child! I imagine she had fallen for his brute strength. I believe there are many such women in the world, though I've never gone in for what I think is called feminine psychology. Anyway, I could see far enough to realise that she was just a little thing he would take in his stride.

"D'you know him?"

The child was suspicious. I guess she knew by the looks that passed between us. Denial would be silly.

"A big, hairy-chested gorilla with a bit of glass sunk in his face?"

She smiled through her tears.

"I've seen him pick up a man in each hand and throw them into the street."

And when she said that she said everything there was to say about Fernando. It was revealing enough.

"But don't think he is responsible. I knew damned well what I was doing. I went into it all with my eyes wide open. Perhaps it just had to be. He'd give me anything. I gave him everything."

She dashed a baby hand across her eyes.

"If you think I'm going to any American Mission to ask for help, you're quite wrong. Now supposing you two, with your funny ideas of rescuing a damsel in distress, get out of here—and stay out!"

Jenkins had a twisted mouth that could curl back in a sardonic sort of way.

"Oh, no, sister. We're here to talk some sense into that pretty little head of yours. I guess I'd do as much for my own kid sister. We ain't taking 'no' for an answer."

"What do you boys propose to do—carry me off bodily?"

"I wouldn't be surprised, sister."

She started laughing then, queer sort of laughter with hysterics flooding up behind. Personally, I felt as comfortable as a duck in a desert. Jenkins appeared to have taken charge of the situation and I had yet to learn just how far he would go. He was staring at the girl in a strange kind of way, as if he were making some momentous decision.

It was a problem—a problem of time. I was incapable of doing anything more. By that time imagination was paralysed. Maybe it was the cheap

wine, but I was beginning to feel a bit foolish about the whole affair. After all, I told myself, this kid might be in the game because she liked it. Some women do. And there's always dope. The booze had made her open her mouth too wide. If I could just pass it off at that and get out, as she said. . . .

And I knew I was just fooling myself. There was no mistaking the bitterness that washed over her face every now and again, in spite of the show she put up. For such a little body she had an enormous reserve of independence and self-willed spirit.

Jenks had grown tired. He stood up, towering over her as she lay there curled up like a little ball, and demanded that she get going. And she would laugh that ugly little laugh of hers that didn't seem far from tears, and sneer at him with that strange, dangerous, glistening look.

That then was the sort of little spitfire she was. Watching her I realised it was all foolishness—this notion of helping a little white girl to get out of the muck of sensualism. She was just a bundle of emotions. While she had been laughing and crying by turns she had merely appeased a desire for sensations, for thrills. And I wondered how long it took Captain Fernando to find it all out.

Jenks did not see. He saw only an obstinate child. Besides what was the use of making a play for a man already satisfied? How could he be expected to see? He was fast losing patience. By then I was merely a looker-on, a spectator. And a strange tableau it was.

Suddenly the scene had changed. Jenks grabbed her by the shoulder, a mere fistful, tore the silk covering away and wound it about her mouth. Then he picked her up, stowed her, struggling helplessly like a child, under his arm. I jumped to my feet and tore aside the curtains.

There was no one on the balcony. The show appeared to be over and the little retreats were all filled with revellers, curtains drawn. I hurried along towards the steps, Jenks with parcel under his arm following. We made them easily enough, started to descend, reached the courtyard below—and ran into a bunch of youths and girls.

They all began to yelp and scream at once. Apparently they had recognised Suzanne by the strips of yellow silk and decided we were trying to kidnap her.

The next few minutes were fairly hectic. I found myself surrounded by a clawing group of women and youths. We struck out right and left. Jenks was handicapped. He could use only one arm. Women were dancing around him and screaming the name of Suzanne. Bedlam was let loose. The courtyard was in an uproar and people were yelling from the balcony, demanding to know what all the pother was about.

A hefty wench leapt at my shoulders and started to drag me backwards. Her hands were over my eyes and I was blinded by the suddenness of the trick. For a brief minute it looked as if it were all over for me. I heaved, gave a wrench of the shoulders, and threw her. She took some of her companions with her before she hit the ground.

I leapt in again. Jenks was surrounded by a regular mob, using a fist and two feet, but he still held on to the parcel under his arm. The weedy youths were of little account. Two of them lay flat on the ground. Passed out. The women were another kettle of fish altogether. They were hanging on to Jenkins like a lot of leeches, except that they used teeth.

I sailed in, cracking one after another, till he had his arm free again. I yelled to him. We made a dive for the street. There was a clattering and scuffling down the steps, hoarse, raucous voices. Several outsize Moors rolled up, nasty-looking propositions, and barred our retreat.

"Follow me!" snapped Jenkins.

He held up the girl and rushed at them. I guess his idea was that they wouldn't dare to strike with their knives while he held the girl. Good tactics as far as it went. But he was tripped, went down, carrying the girl with him, while I, following up, shot over him and into the dirt. We were down in a heap, Moors atop, women dancing and yapping all around us.

The next thing Suzanne was on her feet, shrieking and yelling at everybody around her, a tornado in miniature. But, to our amazement, the mob began to drop back at the sound of her voice! There was no doubt about it, she was a person of consequence in this dirty backwash of Larache. My companion and I got to our feet, wondering if we looked as foolish as we felt.

This was a turning of the tables with a vengeance. I guess we were good and sober by then. The motley gathering of sullen men and women, robbed of a

rough house with the two Légionnaires, was breaking up. One gathered that the child Suzanne was telling them all to go about their business—and they were going!

In short, the damsel we had set out to rescue was now calmly rescuing us. In that awful minute I felt about the size of two bits. Friend Jenks was brushing his ragged uniform, perhaps because he did not know what else to do in those awful, illuminating moments.

The little white girl, arms akimbo, stood watching the scene, the retreating natives and the two non-plussed and awkward Légionnaires. Her baby face was puckered up in an indescribable expression of contempt. That child had missed her vocation. She would have made a fortune in drama, and another as a story-teller.

She had come from Tangier all right. But she had never reached that lovely white city by way of a P. & O. ship from the London River. We learned many moons later, when we felt we could face the subject and raise some inquiries—and it may as well be told now—that she had never seen any other land but Morocco!

She was born in Tangier—offspring, it was said, of a Portuguese mother and a Moorish Arab father. In the international zone she had picked up all the tongues spoken there, this gutter brat with the face of an angel and the imaginative powers of a sensational dramatist. English, French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Arabic—all fell glibly from her baby tongue. Her fluency in languages was in fact the least part of an astounding make-up.

As for her chatter about Captain Fernando—maybe there was a modicum of truth in the wild flights of imagination. Doubtless she had met him in the course of her meanderings. But as I came to know him later I came to the conclusion that he was not at all the kind of wallah who would take little Suzanne for a trip through French Morocco.

The remainder, I fear, must be put down to the stupefying qualities of cheap Spanish wine. From that hectic night onwards Jenkins and I were sealed chambers with regard to women, firmly convinced that our knowledge of the queer cattle was precisely nil. We decided that henceforth we would concentrate our activities on the job of campaigning—a decision, needless to say, which was not always strictly adhered to—since we both knew a little about the more organized sort of fighting.

As friend Jenks would say whenever that particular night was mentioned:

“Gosh, buddy! We *must* have had a snootful!”

CHAPTER V

ARZILA

AFTER that appalling night, it was a great relief to sit a mount and ride comfortably with the squadron of Moroccan cavalry. We left Larache early in the morning but already the city was awake and proceeding about its multifarious activities.

The sun shone from a blazing blue-steel arc of sky down upon the seething movement and colour of the town. Larache had resumed its normal life. Out beyond the noise and clamour of the Suks funerals passed and re-passed. Death seemed always to be forcing his presence upon the life of these cities of Maroc.

I rode at the head of the squadron with Captain Fernando. We went along at a steady gallop, saying nothing, intent, as it seemed, upon the job ahead. But I thought much. Even as I stared to my front, I could still see that rimless monocle sunk deep in the fleshy jowl, for with each little movement the bit of glass would catch the glare of the sun's rays and flash. I had the crazy notion that it was flashing messages to me. That monocle, I discovered, had enormous power over these Moorish cavalry. They simply worshipped its owner, believed that the eye behind it had supernatural powers. It certainly fascinated me!

I wondered just what contact, if any, the officer

had made with that she-devil, Suzanne. I guess I was filled up with her that morning. Maybe the opportunity would arise when I could discuss the amazing child with this new chief of mine. She had said a lot about him, one way or another, things a girl could hardly know of a fellow unless she had been somewhat intimate with him.

It was an unforgettable ride that morning. We rode more or less parallel with the coastline, within a few miles of the sea. That part of Morocco is in striking contrast with the interior, for instead of the dun sand and sun-dried scrub there is everywhere beautiful green sward, undulating, like the rolling downs of the Sussex county of England.

A vast green land of rolling hills and picturesque valleys. Sometimes I think that part of Morocco is the most beautiful spot in the world. We travelled hour after hour through the most fertile countryside, where the good red earth produces olives, figs, dates, pomegranates, lemons and oranges in abundance. Occasionally we came upon a peaceful farmstead with its surrounding acres, saw ancient wooden ploughs such as our forbears used two thousand years ago, and to which were harnessed camels or mules or both!

At intervals the wide expanse of verdant green was broken by colourful patches of wild flowers—mimosa, iris, arum lily, lady's smock, gentian, wild poppies and wild daisies in all the colours of the rainbow. These created breath-taking splashes of colour over the emerald fertility of the plains and it was difficult then to believe that we were of the armed force that was stirring up revolt throughout

the length and breadth of Spanish Morocco, for, of course, even during the wildest phases of that crazy revolution there were great stretches of country untouched by the passions of blood-smearing men and women.

We passed through a valley where every sort of vegetation luxuriated, where giant cactus reaching to a height of nearly twenty feet bloomed with golden flowers not unlike the tulip, where all manner of luscious fruit hung heavy on the trees—and then out to the plains again, passing great fields of corn.

We must have been riding for about five hours when we saw the spiral of smoke on the horizon. We drew nearer. The spiral had turned into a great black column of smoke. This was not Arzila. It was little more than a hamlet. Trouble there. The village had been fired.

The captain rapped out an order. The squadron leapt forward as one. Thereafter a hell-for-leather race towards the smoking ruins. We pulled up before a scene of desolation and ruin. What had once been a small cluster of habitations was now a heaped-up pile of blackened and smoking wreckage.

It seemed incredible to me—after those hours of riding through the glorious countryside. Death, spoliation, mutilation, devastation, while one's mind still dwelt upon the beautiful banks of flowers.

We dismounted on the veritable edge of the burning debris. There didn't seem to be a living soul left in the village. We stood staring at the broken hovels and littered streets. The place had been pillaged, gutted. We approached cautiously,

guns at snap. Horrible things in every tin alley and street.

This was the first of a series of outrages we were destined to come upon during our travels in those bloodthirsty days of revolution. It was not, we found, the work of either nationalist or loyalist. Just an example of wanton marauding and plunder by Riff and Berber bandits who had come down from the hills unchecked because the armed forces of law and order were quarrelling amongst themselves.

The little village was a shambles. Dead lay about in grotesque, crumpled shapes. Men, women and children all shared the same fate. Headless bodies lay athwart the tumbledown thresholds. Christian Arabs had paid for their allegiance to the Spanish government, for their change of faith. The Berber never forgives a change of faith, never forgets.

Evidence of his ghastly work was over all of that village—the pale-brown bodies of women and girls pinned to the timbers torn from buildings, the bronzed torsos of half-naked men mutilated beyond description, men and girls lashed together in obscene bundles, violating the sanctity of death. Charred piles of household goods through which protruded half-burnt limbs. Smouldering heaps everywhere. Unspeakable atrocities committed upon man, woman and child, and the frightful evidence left behind for all men to see.

For these had become Christian pigs, offal of the Nasrani, fit subjects for every sort of perverted and sadistic act of violation and disfiguration. The lust-maddened bandits had loosed themselves upon the

village. Unleashed passions had held sway for hours of slaughter and atrocity, for vile outrage upon woman and child, in that country village surrounded by rich emerald plains, upon which the sun shone in all its glory and majesty.

You have to look upon a scene like that, stand amidst all that filth and ruin, to know the savagery and bestiality of mankind. And this can happen, not in some remote and uncivilised corner of the globe, but in Morocco, the sunny land that is but three days' sail from Paris or London.

Vultures stalling up there. Vultures feeding in alley and hovel where the fires had died. Red-necked, ragged vultures rising with a flurry of wings as we approached. Grey rats scuttling for cover. And there wasn't a thing we could do about it. The marauders had fled, had taken with them all that they could carry.

In the ordinary way of duty our commander would have raced his squadron towards the hills in the hope of tailing the perpetrators. But these days were different. We had to reach Arzila at the earliest possible moment. In this case, at all events, the dead must be left to bury itself. We had to leave the village to the wheeling scavengers.

Quite frankly, I was more than glad to get away from the ghastly spectacles, the putrid stench that seemed to rise in the heat haze like a cloud, a poisonous, nauseating vapour.

In a few moments we were in formation again. The village was behind us. We were back on the great wide road—the road splendidly built by *Légionnaires* for the country's ever-increasing motor

traffic—at least, it had been developing until this mad revolt turned the country into a bloody cockpit for every bunch of bandits, thugs and murderers.

In a few minutes we had caught up with the fleeing remnants of that village—the “lucky” ones who had escaped, the hounded men and women who had managed to make the getaway, hoofing through the fields with a few of their possessions on their backs and pathetic little toddlers stumbling at their heels. They saw us approaching, made for the open road, yelling to us to stop.

The captain called a halt. We sat our mounts and waited while they tumbled across the field towards us. There was hardly more than a score of them. They presented the most pathetic picture as they gathered in the roadway. Some of the women rushed up to our commander, gesticulating and shouting. They clung to his mount, embraced his legs, kissed his boots.

The horse became restive, lashed out and scattered the wailing women. The captain yelled at them to be quiet, then called one of their men. The fellow stepped forward. He was a bronzed, grizzled old Arab, with a face of well-weathered teak, and he looked as if he'd spent the best part of half a century tilling the soil. The old man told the story of the Berbers' descent upon his village, gave us all the sickening details—or as much as he had been able to see from his farm which lay just beyond the village.

It was a terrible tale. It was made the more terrible by the calm, matter-of-fact manner in which he held to it. Doubtless this old warrior had seen many

such happenings in his time. He was typical of his breed—utterly fatalistic. The Berbers had come. The Berbers had gone. There was now one village less in which to sell his bit of produce.

And all the time, while he talked in his calm, unhurried way, a handful of children stood about the road weeping, grimy faces smudged, pathetic mouths quivering. Children, thought I, are just children the world over. Some of these, it appeared, had lost mother or father in that shambles of a village back there. Would the captain escort them to Arzila—which was less than twenty miles ahead?

Captain Fernando fixed the little group of refugees with his eyeglass, hesitated for an appreciable second, then informed the old man that the women and children could be taken into the saddles but the men among them must hoof along.

When we started off again we must have presented an unusual picture, with the women and youngsters across the knees of the squadron, while the menfolk hung on to saddle straps and trotted alongside the mounts.

We travelled that fashion until we came within sight of Arzila. Then a halt was called, the refugees set down again, and we continued on our way. What happened to them afterwards I never knew, but I imagine they made the remainder of the road on foot easily enough.

We reached Arzila in late afternoon. Nothing could have looked more peaceful than that little town by the sea. I don't quite know what I expected, perhaps another sanguinary scrap with the women of the death squads on the outskirts of the town.

Nothing of the sort occurred. Our approach had been sighted and a detachment of *Légionnaires* came out to meet us. We were escorted to the horse-lines behind the barracks. Apparently the trouble was over for the nonce.

Like most of the towns and cities in the Protectorate, Arzila was composed of the old and the new, the old native city being left untouched within its surrounding walls, while the new Spanish garrison town grew up within a few yards of the old city gates.

Arzila was once a flourishing fishing port on the Atlantic seaboard. Its position is some thirty-five miles south of Tangier, and between the two is the International Bridge which was taken over by the Spanish Foreign Legion without opposition at the beginning of the revolt.

The old city has a tumbled, picturesque look. There are no streets in the ordinary sense of that term, but a regular network of winding narrow alleys, with long stretches of high walls in which are set the heavy timbered, worm-eaten doors of the various abodes. Behind these walls of pebble and mud and straw the Moslem women are able to walk in their courtyards or gardens secure from the profane glances of the populace in the open thoroughfares.

Arzila is made up of these narrow lanes and blind habitations crowded one upon another, so that the sky is like a narrow blue lid to the streets. In the hot season the people sleep out on the flat roofs of their houses, and there the children sometimes play—though how they escape falling into the alleys below has always been a mystery to me, since the

parapets edging the buildings are hardly three feet high.

Around the whole cluster of houses, suks, mosques and shops, runs a stone wall with battlemented ramparts, fifteen to twenty feet high, which was built during the time of the Portuguese occupation. One part of this wall abuts on the seashore and is a strongly fortified sea wall. Here the wall is wide enough for an automobile to be driven along the crest. It commands the sea and the town.

Within the sea wall is the famous palace built by the mountain chieftain, Raisuli, who died a prisoner of Abd-el-Krim. What an opportunity the present revolt would have been for these two fearless brigands! Both have made war on the French and Spanish in Morocco. Now one is dead and the other, Abd-el-Krim, after waging a five years' war against the French, was taken prisoner and then banished to the Isle of Reunion, together with his sons and numerous wives and a small army of retainers.

Raisuli's palace is a magnificent structure, one of the sights of Morocco, and contains some of the finest mosaic tiling to be found anywhere. Typically Moorish in architecture and decorative carvings, it stands square to the sea front and commands a grand view of the rolling breakers of the Atlantic.

My stay in Arzila is memorable largely because of the nights I spent within the shadow of the wonderful palace. That first night our squadron mounted a double-armed guard on the sea wall, and I had the not unpleasant job of keeping a watch on the sea wall patrol.

To all appearances the civilian populace of Arzila had accepted the Nationalist government and were settling down to their normal every-day affairs. It was known, however, that a number of loyalists were in hiding in the neighbourhood. The change over of government was by no means securely established.

One never knew whence the attack might come—from the sea or the shore, from the old city or the new town. There were enemies within the gates and without. In the countryside beyond the town there were perpetual skirmishes, a constant routing of snipers who had a habit of appearing on the outer confines of the area in the cool of the evening.

There Spanish civilians calling themselves loyalists, efficiently armed, out for blood, determined not to accept the new order of things despite the overwhelming odds against them. There were native bands, armed to the teeth, ever on the alert and ready to step into any battle that nationalist or loyalist might open up. To those brigands of the hills, fighting is an industry just as much to-day as it was in the good old days of their forbears. They loathed and feared the commercial development of Morocco, for it was this incursion that drove them further and further into the interior, and further away from that which they considered their legitimate pursuit—banditry.

So that, between the two hostile bodies, the bandits and the loyalists, the nationalists had their hands full for long after the revolt was reported to be successfully concluded in Morocco.

I shall not soon forget an eerie sort of incident of



THE COURTYARD OF EL RAISULI'S PALACE AT ALGERIA

that first night on the sea wall. It was a moonless night and there was a curious, semi-opaque gloom over the sea. A few stars twinkled in the lilac dome overhead. Altogether it was a difficult light.

Every four yards or so along the wall were two armed Moors, the scheme being that each double guard should keep their neighbours in sight. I had patrolled the whole length of wall with Jenkins, who was to relieve me for a spell. We turned round to retrace our steps, pulled up with a jerk. Jenkins spat out an unprintable oath. I gasped, staring in amazement. At our feet were two of the guard, crumpled up, stuck in the back.

In a few seconds the whole camp was roused. Messages were despatched to the garrison—across a patch of open ground seven hundred yards away. A detachment of men came up at the double. The tide was coming in. It was perhaps a dozen yards from the sea wall. Search parties were sent out to comb every inch of sand and to drill the waterline with sprays of machine-gun fire. Others searched inside the wall. Detachments scoured the alleys of the old city. Searchlights spread beams over every likely hiding place.

All to no purpose. There wasn't a sign of the perpetrators anywhere. Captain Fernando turned the bodies over with his foot, removed the knives, fired queries in my direction. It seemed incredible that the stickers could have made a getaway—unless they were excellent swimmers and had gone far out to sea.

But what was more incredible—and it required a devil of a lot of explaining to the commander—was

how they had been able to get on the wall and knife the guards without being seen. As the officer complained, it was done right under our noses. We had not seen a thing nor heard anything unusual. Yet we were within a few yards of the spot where it happened. It was all too damnably uncanny and I didn't like it.

If it were so easy . . . not a man among us was safe, despite the precaution of double guards and short patrols. Nobody bothered about sleep for the remainder of that night. This was something that touched every man Jack of us. I guess we were all asking pretty much the same query: Whose turn next?

The wall guard concentrated on the sea. There was another double guard down inside the wall. It was a grim task staring hour after hour at the wash of the blue-black waves, waiting for something to roll up. If those stickers had taken to the water there was just a chance that they hadn't time to get out of range by the time the machine guns started popping.

That angry tumbling sea, the gloom over the water, fitted my mood, I guess. Whenever I look at the sea at night I think of that nocturnal watch and every detail rises stark and clear in the mind, the boom and crash of the breakers, the crunching feet of shadowy forms pacing up and down, the constant challenges and the swift replies.

But dawn broke over the waters, the tide receded, nothing resembling a body was washed up, nothing further happened. We were relieved of duty and retired to our quarters. The loss of two Moors didn't

matter a great deal. But the way of their going was a whale of a problem.

When Jenks and I turned out towards dusk of that day for a stroll around Arzila, our first opportunity, the place appeared astonishingly peaceful and calm. A number of Légionnaires in slacks and canvas shoes were tending the flower gardens that bordered the barracks. The scene was too beautifully domestic for words!

"Can you beat that!" grinned Jenkins.

That was the whole trouble with the Spanish revolt in Morocco. You never knew where you were. Peace one minute and hell let loose the next. A man gets tired of being on the jump when there isn't anything to jump about, and being caught napping when he thinks all is serene.

Anyway, we decided that this was an occasion for relaxation—and that means only two things to a Légionnaire, booze and women. My Moorish servant was as good as his word. He turned Arzila inside out for us, not that there was much to see. It's a smallish sort of place all piled up in a heap, as it were, and though there are thousands of acres of land lying idle immediately beyond the confines of the town, there are people actually living in the ground, in what during the European War we called dug-outs—except that these miserable habitations had no baulks of timber, no railway sleepers to support the crumbling walls.

When darkness descended we found ourselves in an intricate maze of foul-smelling alleys. There was no street lighting and some of those twisting byways were hardly wide enough for two men to walk abreast.

I don't think I'm easily scared, but I couldn't help thinking then of what had occurred on the previous night and what an ideal situation this was for the slick wallah with a knife.

In places it was as inky black as it well could be, as if one were traversing the unpaved floors of a dungeon. We didn't meet any apache guy with a knife, but I stumbled through an archway right into the arms of a giggling wench. It was so dark I could not tell whether she were Spaniard or Arab or child of both. I closed, pawed her all over, which made her giggle all the more. But I wasn't feeling amorous just then. On the contrary. I was groping for a weapon. She did not appear to have any.

"What's on?" growled Jenks.

"Thought maybe she had a knife."

That started an altercation between her and my servant—who rejoiced in the name of Ahmad the Jackal. Incidentally, what is often a nickname in our tongue becomes a real one in Arabic. The name certainly suited this Moorish youth. He was lean and wiry and had the slinking peculiarity of that noisome animal. But, unlike the jackal, he had a streak of humour in his queer make-up. He appeared to be arguing with the girl in a native patois which was quite over our heads. *

"What does the woman want?"

"She say perhaps señor like top of her house. See much."

"Sure!" laughed Jenkins. "Let's go."

We went through the archway, tailing the mysterious woman into a patio where, surprisingly, the air was fresh and sweet. There was a large square

kohl in her eyes to make them sparkle, a tattooing of lips and chin and forehead, a piercing of ears and septum for the rings of gold, finally a spraying from top to toe with a secret preparation known only to these Moors which gave the skin the feel of velvet.

So much for the secrecy of the harem.

It began to dawn on me that we were snooping at a sacred ceremony and that were we caught we should all be hanged, drawn and quartered. This, in the eyes of the Moslems, was the sin of sacrilege.

It was then that I realised the craftiness of Ahmad the Jackal. His meeting with the woman in that archway down there was no accident. It had all been arranged. This bit of spicy snooping was by way of being a special tit-bit in the night's entertainment. Ahmad the Jackal had been out on this game before. He was a louse of the first water and would know all about these hole-and-corner delights.

Where had the wiry devil got to, anyway? I swung round, upsetting the girl in my lap. She gave a stifled squeak.

"Señor! Señor! What is it?"

"Ahmad the Jackal? Where is he?"

She shrugged, pointed downwards to the courtyard, opined that Ahmad the Jackal was no good but that Jenkins and I were the world's finest gentlemen, only in more voluptuous phraseology. That seemed to be the situation. I had already gathered as much.

A growl came from further along the wall, a muffled sort of intonation, but unmistakably the voice of Jenkins.

"Pipe down, for the love of Petel!"

He also was engaged.

Down in that building only a few yards away a man waited for his new bride. In my lap a girl I'd never seen before and would probably never recognise if I saw her again, a Spanish girl telling the tale of Moslem nuptials in tones intimately sweet and not without design. It would all be just dandy if I could only rid the mind of that picture of the sticking of two men at my feet less than twenty-four hours ago.

And while I cogitated the show was over. The hens had risen, were fluttering and ushering the timid pullet towards the steps which led to her fate below. We watched them go, watched until the last old hag had disappeared from view, until there was nothing left but the night and señorita—now stretching herself like a young animal, graceful, feline of movement.

I lay back, resting from a cramped position, gazed up at the lilac dome filled with stars. It was a glorious night, a night for dreams, for the poetry of romance. Nothing stirred then. I became aware of the fact that there was no one on that roof save the girl and myself. She might have been asleep for all the movement she made. Perhaps she was asleep.

How varied are the wiles of women. This, thought I, was the technique of the sleepy cat, content with the display of somnolent curve and contour. Or maybe she was very old and very wise in the ways of men, was too much of a connoisseur to break in upon the other fellow's temperamental dreamings.

I don't know how long we remained like that. For a space my thoughts were three thousand miles away from that flat roof in Arzila, dwelling upon just such

a night in Arizona. The murmuring sounds had died away. The warm night was breathlessly still. A troubled little sigh broke through my absorption. I turned and gazed at her. She smiled.

She laughed, breathless with challenge, eyes gleaming in the shadows of the parapet. She was very beautiful then, so radiant, exquisitely vulnerable, a live thing that seemed a part of this mysterious darkness.

Eons later, as it seemed, we were roused to the realities of this mad Moroccan world by the shrill screams of the alarm signals. The night was suddenly hideous with the din of those whistles. The city was breaking out of its slumber. From the distance came a rush of feet, thudding along the unpaved alleys. Lights stabbed the darkness. Voices of men and women on roof-tops and in the streets below, alarmed, fearful sounds.

A shot rang out, shattering the nocturnal peace. Then a clattering and crashing of firearms. What had happened? Was this a repetition of the preceding night? More killers at bay?

We leapt to our feet, the girl and I, stared at each other for a stupid minute. Ahmad the Jackal rushed across the flat roof towards us, shouting to us to hurry, hurry!

"What is it?"

"Señor Yenkin say—come quickly. We go cham-bree!"

Of course. There had been another attack in the dark. They were turning out patrols. Soon the whole city would be full of prowling troops. I ran down the steps to the courtyard, followed by

Ahmad the Jackal. Jenkins was there, cussing and growling.

"Hey, buddy! Come on! Hell's loose again!"

"What's happened?"

"How in hell should I know? We'd better beat it back to the barracks. Old One-eyed Window will be bawling his head off for us, and there'll be hell to pay."

"But the squadron isn't on duty to-night," I said lamely, as we raced along through the streets.

"What difference does that make? He'll turn the mob out, just the same. There's a war on around these parts, buddy."

Sure. There was still the war of revolt in Morocco.

CHAPTER VI

SUR LES TOITS D'ARZILA

FOR the remainder of that night in Arzila law and disorder played a grim game of hide-and-seek. I found myself in charge of a detachment of our squadron—twenty-five men—one of a score of such prowling patrols combing the highways and byways of that warren of a city.

Two more guards had made the trek into the great unknown. The garrison commander was considerably perturbed. It was his job to keep the city quiet, to keep up the pretence that Arzila had been subdued and that the new government was securely established therein.

Not only had two guards been killed, but their bodies had been spirited away, leaving only tell-tale patches of blood behind on the wall. From which it was concluded their going had been gruesomely hurried.

All this under the noses of a strong Legion guard. They had proved themselves no whit better than the boys of the Moroccan cavalry. That was some consolation for us—if there be any consolation in ensanguined affairs of this sort.

But this time we were determined to get the killers. Orders had gone forth that the patrols would not cease until they had been found. The killers had taken the bodies with them, perhaps with the idea

of terrorising the rank and file of the nationalists, especially the native element. It began to look as if somebody were preparing the way, by a weakening of the morale of the governing force, for a counter revolution.

Why had they taken the bodies? That uncanny trick might well prove their undoing. There had been no trace of them, no impressions on the strip of sand below the sea wall. It appeared fairly certain that they had not made a getaway in that direction.

The old city was scored off in sections. We started a house-to-house search. That did not merely mean we forced an entry into the sacred abodes of the people and searched the places from top to bottom. Much more. Indeed a much more drastic business.

Spanish Légionnaires are a pretty tough mob. Turn them loose on a city . . . and what is likely to ensue? The native soldiery are in even worse case. Put them in some position of authority over their civilian compatriots and there are no limits to free-booting. They entered the homes of the people to search, to amuse themselves, to help themselves, to vent their spleen on all and sundry in the holy name of authority.

If a tribe of the wildest and most bloodthirsty bandits had been let loose on that city, the effect could not have been more horrible. I know because I was utterly impotent in the hands of my twenty-five rascals. My difficulty was to get them out of one abode and into the next.

Especially when they found liquor and women. The night was made hideous with the screams of

women and the howling of children. There were those who escaped into the dirty alleys, to run wildly about the dark warrens with most of the clothing torn from their backs.

What a riot it all was! Hundreds of men off the leash. In less than an hour the whole Arab city had gone crazy. Killers were about by the score. In the grim dusky streets every archway, every wall angle became a death trap. Men would dart out, women would leap out, suddenly, out of the blackness, slit the throat of a passing soldier, and as swiftly disappear.

That black night, by our crazy tactics, the death list grew and grew. God! What a shambles we are building up, I thought. We came to search for two killers. We created many other killers.

You have to live through such a night of horror, such a bestial exhibition of fratricide, to appreciate fully the foul depths to which men and women can sink.

To be found in possession of a knife was enough for those liquored-up, lust-crazed, blood-spilling soldiers. Raucous guffaws and piteous shrieks. Women denuded, fighting for their sanity, because one lascivious beast followed another in bestial succession.

There were some women who leapt in terror—from the flat roofs of their abodes down into the dirty alleys. And there they lay, to be trampled upon by trooper and civilian killer alike. Nor did mere girls and boys escape.

One youth, pluckier than a dozen men, leapt out of the darkness yelling of that which had been done

to his mother. He was caught, pinned to a door with his own knife. Because I could not stand the piercing shrieks I turned back, pointed my mauser for a more merciful death.

We found the killers. Rather, they found us. Not two, but a few score and two. I began to long for daylight. I was not alone in the prayer. We soon realised what a Frankenstein we had loosed upon ourselves. We began as a swaggering, free-booting crew, Long before it was all over we were fighting for our lives.

Shots were snapping and crackling about the funnels of darkness then. Hidden snipers had turned the rout into a pitched battle. We were turning into a particularly noisome alley when a hail of shot met us. We crouched for cover. At the far end loomed a tall building. It seemed to bristle with guns. From its roof and archways shots stabbed the blackness.

We could but fire blindly at that opaque façade. But for those hidden in the building it was a simple matter to pot at every little movement down below. Another patrol joined us. We tried to advance with the idea of surrounding the house. It was too well fortified with men and shot.

Whether this were the secret stronghold of the loyalists or merely a house where bandits had gathered we did not then know. All we knew was that they were very efficiently checking our mad progress. We crouched by the alley walls, in archways, took aim at the stabs of fire that momentarily lit the side of the place like a battleship.

More and more Legion patrols joined us, until it seemed that half the strength of Arzila lay packed

us were asking that question. The block was now surrounded. They faced death on all sides. Yet one had a mental picture of those strange women gloating up there, waiting for daylight too, maybe, the better to see the havoc they could wreck among mere men down below.

There was a weird, eerie atmosphere about that alley in the hour which preceded the dawn. It was strangely cold. A deathly stillness while a bunch of crazed women waited and watched to see what a mob of *Légionnaires* and Moroccans would do when the light came. Anxious, impatient eyes scanned the starry dome. We could feel the approach of dawn long before the first faint pencilling of light slit the roof of the street.

It was a grim break of day that came up over the narrow strip of sky. The stars paled. The lilac hue gave way to a cold greyness. A streak of light shot up obliquely, filling the alley with deceptive half-lights. There was a stirring among the crouching, drowsing men. Many realised that with the full light of day their position would be intolerable.

Detachments were told off to station themselves on roofs overlooking the stronghold. We broke our way into the abodes, now mostly empty, and climbed upwards. With my party I reached a flat roof some two hundred yards away from the objective. In the half-light it was difficult to detect any movement over there.

Suddenly the sky was a blaze of colour. Buildings had turned from drab grey to a dull red. Yellow streaks over the crimson, then a glaring brassy light that was almost blinding in its sudden flash.

We slouched by the parapet, our guns at the ready; but there was no sign of man or woman on that roof. Our view commanded every corner of it. After all why should we have expected them to remain on the roof and expose themselves to every neighbouring building?

I looked down at the façade of the house—gasped. Every shutter was pierced. Every window behind those shutters was a machine-gun nest! With the first flood of sunlight into the long narrow alley they broke into action. The staccato chatter of a dozen pieces shattered the morning stillness, crashing the ear-drums with a shocking reverberation.

In sixty seconds they had swept the street clean of every living thing. No man dared approach that death-dealing hail of lead. This, then, was the trump card of the women of the death squad, for there had been no sign of machine-gun action from that quarter during the long night.

Someone leapt across the alley. Instantaneously the guns broke into a stuttering chant of shot. The daring one escaped into the opposite building, however, for the street was hardly two yards across at that point. It was Captain Fernando. A few minutes later he had joined me on the roof.

It seemed there was a strategic scheme afoot for advancing on that building at the end of the alley. It was hopeless to try to approach it from the street. Therefore we must advance by way of the roofs! We must bridge a way from one roof to another with whatever we could improvise. Fortunately the gaps between one building and another were mostly narrow ones, narrow enough for us to leap.

Thereafter a battle of the roofs. It was an amazing sight. For several hundred yards around that stronghold men suddenly appeared on neighbouring roofs, running at the crouch towards parapets, then leaping from one side of a street to another, a grim circle of stalking, leaping men closing in on that one building. Beyond this ring, on more distant roofs, the populace were gathering for the show. It was the most novel entertainment they had had in years!

But the imprisoned women were quick to detect the move. They brought up their guns, assembled them within the canopy at the head of the steps leading to their roof. And from there they proceeded to spray a shower of lead in a wide circle around them.

The effect of that swinging fire was terrific. Men were shot dead in mid-air, in the very act of leaping from one building to another, shot grotesquely straddling the air, arms and legs outspread. There would be a yell of pain, a rifle flung involuntarily into the air, and man and gun would go clattering into the street two to three hundred feet below.

Even if the shot failed to kill, the wild, scrambling descent to the street below would do the rest. There were no wounded among those sent toppling from the roofs, though we left many in our wake as we scuttled across the house-tops. It must have been a thrilling spectacle for those civilians in the gallery seats. For the actors it was a chase with death elbowing one into eternity.

The ring of fire checked us within a few yards of the objective. For hours we lay behind parapets only

fifty yards away and endeavoured to pick off the women behind the machine guns. Soon the crazy timbered structure of the canopy was pitted with holes on every side. But it was standing. We had no means of knowing how many of the women remained within. Their guns did not cease, even though their shelter shivered and shook with the vibrations. They must have crowded five or six guns into that confined space. How many women were there left to manipulate them? How long could they withstand this siege?

The men were villainous for a charge, ready to throw themselves into the spattering fire because they could no longer tolerate the stigma of being held up by a bunch of women. What they promised those women, once they had them in their clutches, would hardly bear repetition. Their language positively sizzled. The men were no longer human in this insane battle of the house-tops.

Our rifle fire appeared to have little or no effect upon the stronghold. The machine guns did not cease.

By this time the sun was in full blast, shedding intense heat upon the roofs of Arzila. In spite of it, however, vast crowds thronged the roofs. The streets below must have been strangely quiet on that eventful morning.

At last our own machine-gun crews began to assemble on the surrounding house-tops. Then the air was filled with a great volume of staccato sounds—the concentration of our automatic guns on that tottering canopy and the answering fire of those women.

The timbered canopy shook under the deathly hail. spurts of smoke rose above the splinters of wood and stone, and suddenly the whole crazy structure was a mass of flames. The guns ceased. There was no more shooting from either side. We stood for a space, watching that conflagration on the roof of the stronghold. . . .

Whistles were blowing, orders were being bawled from mouth to mouth. Once that fire took hold of the timbers of the building it might well spread beyond control, for every house in the place was as dry as tinder, as inflammable as matchwood.

Detachments were ordered to the streets to cut off any attempt on the part of the women to make a getaway. The remainder of us rushed towards the burning roof.

Added to the hot breath of the sun, the heat of that belching fire was appalling. We recoiled at the frightful heat, made frantic rushes at the flames. Scores of men were leaping and dancing about the roaring thing, working feverishly with battens of wood, bundles of rags, anything they could lay their hands upon.

We were trapped! Flames were licking along the timbers in an increasing circle of fire. We were beaten back towards the parapet, clothes, hands, hair and face singed and scarred. In the end we had to retreat to a nearby roof. A fire wagon rushed up, hose was brought into play. It took the better part of an hour to put the ghastly thing under control.

When we returned we found a mass of charred rafters, smouldering debris, the twisted metal of

machine guns, two burned and blackened bodies, gaping holes through which we could glimpse the interiors of the rooms below.

Two of the women had been killed while firing the guns. The men dashed upon them like maniacs, skewered them on their bayonets and tossed them over the parapet.

We dropped into the rooms immediately beneath the roof. They were deserted, of course. No living thing could have remained there under that terrific heat.

The next floor we took more cautiously, went from room to room, turning over bedding, smashing household goods, searching every nook and cranny. Then the next floor down, leaving a trail of wreckage behind us as we descended.

We reached the ground floor without coming upon a soul, but there we found a hidden recess built into the thick wall, a secret hiding for thousands of rounds of ammunition and stacks of guns. If that fire had burned its way down to this arsenal the resulting explosion would have blown the whole neighbourhood to hell.

All this time the house had been surrounded by troops. We broke open the windows and doors and made contact with them. A number of officers gathered in the courtyard, staring up at the wrecked interiors of the house, wondering where in hell the rest of the women had gone. It was inconceivable that two women had held off a whole garrison. What, then, had become of their companions?

They had not emerged on to the streets. That way

of escape was made impossible by the cordon of troops reaching right round the stronghold. That they were still somewhere in the building was the obvious conclusion. Men were sent back into the warrens of the wrecked abode. They searched the structure from its burned-out roof to its littered patio—but without result. Those women still had us beaten, it seemed. Where had they gone? How? They were not magicians. Those hefty, bovine wenches could not disappear into thin air.

"Say, buddy! There ought to be a cellar and a trap-door. There always is in all the best stories."

That was just how I felt. But we could find no trace of anything of the kind. The building stood alone, a rectangular edifice enclosing its own courtyard. It was incredible that anyone could have left the place during the siege.

Then somebody had a brainstorm. There was a fountain in the middle of the patio. It had been out of use for many years, as numbers of these fountains often are. It was composed of a sunken bowl about five feet across with a square of two-foot wall. This low wall was about two feet wide and was covered in blue and white tiling.

When the men got to work to break it up—with some vague idea of making sure there was nothing underneath—a whole section of wall came away in a solid block, revealing a long and narrow cavity. I imagine we stood and stared at that black hole for a space. I could feel the excitement running through the assembled officers and men.

It resembled nothing so much as an elongated grave. And grave it very nearly proved to be for the women who had gone in hiding there!

From the moment of its discovery I don't think anybody had a doubt about this being the hide-out of the feminine killers. We could get no answer to our repeated calls. So we smoked them out with burning rags.

They came up at last, five of them, coughing and spitting, still blasphemously defiant. And what wretched specimens they were! Hair hung about their dirty faces in snaky tails. Their clothing was torn and bedraggled. One of them was quite a young girl, a plump and comely wench, still in her teens. The other four were in much different case, older, in the middle thirties, maybe, with something rather terrible in their dark eyes and in the expressions of their twisted mouths. In more polite society they would have been dubbed mental cases and treated accordingly.

In that sun-drenched courtyard the treatment of them was something entirely alien to polite or civilised society. There was no sort of trial. They were dealt with there and then. No man had any kind of doubt that these were the killers who had stolen out of their hole for two nights past to stab nationalist guards.

They yapped at us with foaming mouths until they were exhausted. Men spat upon them. But for the most part we just stood around in the litter of that patio, a silent group content to stare at the wild vixens until their snarling had died down. They met all questions with sullen eyes

and tight lips, with expressions that seemed to say—"Do your damndest. We have fought for the cause."

Their punishment was certainly of the damndest. At a signal from the officer in charge, a score of men rushed at the women, threw them against the wall of the house and tied them up there.

Damnable killers though they were, I could still feel relieved because I was not ordered to take a part in their punishment. Even while they lashed them to the wall the infuriated men could not restrain themselves. Clothing was torn from their bodies. Heads were thrust with sickening bumps against the peeling stucco. . . .

Officers and non-commissioned officers stood around and watched with apparent indifference while the man-handling went on. No part of the denuded figures was left untouched by the sadistic brutes told off to prepare the miserable women for punishment.

The young girl suffered perhaps more than her older sisters. She had some pretensions to beauty. It was quickly marred, blood-smearcd. Yet she stood it all as stoically as the rest.

They made a terrifying spectacle—terrifying, that is, to my sort of mental make-up. I wanted most passionately to crawl out of that courtyard to some corner where I might find relief from these bestialities. Even I, who had been long enough in Morocco, and further East, to know that such practices were not uncommon. I said as much to Jenkins. We were slouched together in the shadow of an archway. His answer was typical of the fellow.

"Blast you, Terry! D'you think my stomach ain't turning over too! I shan't get the picture of that kid's torn body out of my mind for years. Talk of the Spanish Inquisition!"

And that was but the preliminary, that pawing and mawling, to more dreadful, more lascivious baiting.

It has been said that the Spanish Revolt in the year of grace 1936, was a religious revolt. If that is so, then it was surely in tradition with all other religious revolts and intolerances right back down the ages. Instigated by the same unspeakable hatreds and cruelties, the same barbarities and atrocities were practised by both sides.

But there, in that sunny patio with its walls of white stucco, clawing hands were used instead of shells. Through it all those women hardly murmured. The only signs were the tautly-clipped mouths from which saliva trickled, the faces ghastly pale, the eyes that burned like live coals. Those awful women were scarcely human.

Their tormentors were determined to make them show more vociferous signs. It began when the young girl's arms were freed from the wall shackles. A great hulking brute went up to her, gave her a mocking bow, took the plump little hand in his own and made as if to kiss it in true cavalier fashion. Instead, he suddenly straightened up, grasped the little hand firmly in his big paw, and started to swing the arm round and round from the shoulder socket.

The girl shrieked with the excruciating pain, shrieked until the arm was torn from its socket.

Then she passed out. The head slumped forward in death, a gush of crimson staining the whiteness.

'The hulking fellow took no further notice of her. He still grasped the girl's hand, for he was using the torn limb as a rod with which to beat the other women into insensibility. . . .

CHAPTER VII

A TRAP FOR LOYALISTS

WEEKS went by during which Arzila was more or less normal. Military law prevailed, of course. There were a few round-ups, a number of patrols were turned loose upon the old city to make further searches for arms and further trouble. But as far as the people of Arzila were concerned, this was the routine life of a miserable habitation suffering in the shadow of a revolt. Our presence was tolerated. But the powder magazine was still there.

Over the great green belt that stretched for miles beyond the confines of the city, the story was somewhat different. The clans out there, it seemed, must be subdued anew. These disturbing days offered them grand opportunities for plunder and banditry. Moreover, somebody was gun-running. Cut-throats had been caught in possession of brand-new Mausers, but no amount of torture would induce any of them to reveal the source of supplies.

There were rumours. There always are. The one that appeared to gain most credence was to the effect that the loyalists were responsible for supplying the lawless ones with these fine new guns and the requisite rounds of ammunition, merely to harass and torment the heads of the new regime.

Patrols were sent out constantly. They returned empty-handed, or with a useless captive or two, but

\no real information as to the source of the trouble. The bandits and the loyalist fugitives would come out of the blue of night, wreck and plunder the nearby hamlets, harass the outlying camps, knife a guard, then disappear into the blackness again.

There were a thousand hideouts beyond the rolling green plains, where the wooded hills rose up against the sky and the verdant gullies wandered tortuously for mile after mile. A beautiful country filled with mystery valleys and hidden fastnesses.

Patrolling with the squadron by day was a sheer joy, but after dusk a nightmare, for then every crevice and cranny, every patch of wood and scrub was an effective cover for sniping bandits. Patrolling such regions on moonless nights was little short of suicide. Our routine was to wander up hill and down dale through all of the daylight hours. Dusk found us pitching camp, every man tied to his mount.

But that brief phase had its compensations—plenty. It was glorious to waken to a vast green world in the roseate flush of dawn, a rare thrill to watch the sun splash a riot of colour over the heavens as it climbed over the emerald hills. In that precious hour it was good to be alive. This Spanish revolt and all its devastating horrors seemed a million miles away. The world was a vast green carpet, dotted with the misty blue deeps of the valleys, the violets and browns of the distant wood patches, the startling, colourful blobs of wild flowers, and over all the bursting of a new day in crimson and gold.

Only it did not last. It never did in that benighted country. Nothing endured. Nothing ever would. In that land nothing is, everything is becoming. The sky would become brassy, the sun shed a burning heat, the air lost its savour, became arid, the rolling green land an endless track over which we searched and searched and searched again.

And so on this particular morning, we entered a valley of breath-taking beauty. The hills that rose on either side were just green slopes sprinkled with colour and vegetation. And then phut! A shot echoed metallicly. One of the Moors, riding ahead because he was supposed to be an excellent tracker, yelped, toppled from his saddle, rolled over the sword.

Captain Fernando bit off an oath. That was the second tracker we had lost within the hour. The squadron was brought to a halt. We sat our mounts and stared up the green hillside from which the shot had come. They were deadly snipers, these folk of the green hills. There wasn't a sign of a living soul up there.

That small patch of cactus might hide two or three sharpshooters. It was decided to investigate. Jenkins and a dozen men dismounted and started to climb. A flurry of shots rang out. Every man dropped like a stone.

Then silence all over that lovely green valley. Puffs of smoke dissipated into the heat haze. I stared at the hillside. Jenkins raised an arm, started to crawl upwards, his men following.

We remained in the lee of a bank and watched. The stalkers inched their way upwards, bodies

wriggling in the brush. For a space nothing happened—just a shimmering, bright silence. The Moors belly-crawled through the carpet of undergrowth with scarcely a sound. It was exciting to watch.

We saw them spreading out like a crescent, closing in slowly round that cactus patch. Then another gust of shot, snapping and crackling in the morning air. Three Moors rolled down the hillside like grotesque bundles of rags, their rifles clattering after them.

Our men opened fire, peppered the bush with rapid volleys, ran forward at the crouch, firing from snap as they closed in. We heard Jenkins yell an order. The shots died. Three dead Arabs were dragged from the bush and tumbled down the hill—delivered, as Jenks afterwards remarked, with compliments. But those three had got four of our men before they passed out, and that sort of skirmish isn't much fun.

We roamed the hillsides on both flanks without coming upon another sniper, mounted again and passed on. That was how we dribbled dead men—our own—about those lovely green valleys. And after a week or so it was apt to get on one's nerves. We burned to get the wallahs in a bunch out in the open. Fernando swore he would not rest until he had the leader behind these scattered sharpshooters.

So far we had not been able to get one of them alive—but we did, towards the end of that wearisome, heated day. We had halted under the shelter of a great jutting ridge of moss-grown rock. It looked like an ideal spot for the night's camp—

until that damnably familiar crackle of shots rent the air again.

The Captain rapped out orders. Mounts were hurriedly driven under the cover of the overhanging ridge. From across the gulley and about half-way up the hillside shots were being poured into us. Quite a mob over there. We returned the fire, but as we could not sight a single one of 'em, ours was blind firing in the wilderness of scrub and boulder.

The situation was desperate because we had to rout these snipers before darkness descended upon us . . . or they would further diminish our dwindling squadron by slow and devastating degrees. I had no doubt in my mind that this same band of hostile Arabs had been stalking us for more than a week. That sort of game, played slowly enough and craftily enough could, in time, account for the whole lot of us.

Nobody recognised that better than Fernando. Rivulets of sweat streamed round his monocle as he stood there in the lee of the ridge and watched the bullets spattering about the valley. His heavy jowl was set like rock. He stood there for perhaps five minutes and not a muscle of him moved. He might have been carved there. But I guess there was heavy work going on behind that giant façade.

Then he swung round, stared at me, spoke quietly, so that I hardly heard what he said in the crazy din set up by the sharp-shooters. He ordered out the machine-gun crew. He would take them out himself and up the slope to the ridge above us.

As the crew was a bit of my training, I went along too.

It was not exactly pleasant, crawling into the open and then up the slope, despite the fact that we had plenty of bush and undergrowth to hide our movements. It was a nightmare to me. We had been seen and shot whined around us like whip-thongs, snipping the tangled scrub in a way which made one's scalp tingle.

The climb itself would have been enough, without the added labour of dragging along the gun-parts and the cartridge belts. We would lie flat for a spell with our snouts buried in the dirt while the lead spat about us in all directions. Those devils over there knew precisely what we were attempting and they were determined we should not succeed.

I guess there were moments during that little affair when I felt it was all over. We should never make that ridge. But there was no question of turning back. Captain Fernando led the way. Since he could do it—that was enough for the Moorish wallahs behind him. He could have led them into hell.

Fernando was a man of a few words—and brilliant action. He never even turned about to see whether we followed him after the brief spells of waiting for the hot rain of lead to slacken. He just went on, knowing we should be there.

He was on the ridge first, lying in the cover of a tumble of overgrown rocks. One by one he dragged us up alongside. The gun was assembled, the belts brought up. I was hunched behind the

gun. He threw an order over his shoulder. I got a bead on the spot he indicated and the music began.

And that was fun. We had the range beautifully. A clump of bush on the slope across the valley began to sway, flutter, shiver like a live thing, just as frail trees will under a crashing downpour. And we soon learned that our chattering message was reaching its mark.

Splinters of rock, twigs, spurts of dirt, and then a flurry of arms and legs. . . . Two figures tumbled and crashed among the bushes as they careered madly down the hill. As I squat there, gripping the gun-handles, I felt that perilous climb had been worth while. The gun was singing a song of revenge. We hadn't had a chance like this for days.

Fernando crouched motionless, his monocle fixed on the target. The Moorish crew around me were grinning, eyes bright, feeding the belts with amazing precision. A thrill of savage joy swept through me. This was the life—rat-tat-tat . . . tat-tat . . . tat-tat-tat. . . .

The Captain's hand moved ever so slightly. I glued my eyes to the sights, swung the gun a little to the left, thrust at the firing button. The hand was raised again. My fingers were off the button. The bush over there had parted. A figure in dirty white slumped out, one leg sticking up in the air like a prop. . . .

Again the hand motioned. I applied a steady pressure on the button. The head and arms which had emerged for a second dropped down on the

grotesquely-poised leg. The rescuer had paid for an unguarded second or two.

Captain Fernando was astonishingly long-sighted. Strive as I would, I could not make out any movement over there. But he never made a mistake. Responding to the suggestions of that hand I pressed the button. A short staccato roar. Another hidden figure had been dug out of the hillside.

Our commander was a magician. Certainly the Moors thought so. They put it all down to that bit of glass stuck in his jowl. They really believed it held some sort of magic, that it could penetrate rock and bush, detect the hidden sniper. Sweating behind that gun, I almost believed in the magic powers of that *monocle myself!* It seemed, with the assistance of that moving hand, to guide me to every sniper crouched within the maze of scrub and stone spread over that slope.

Jenkins related afterwards how they lay under the ridge and watched the astounding performance, saw the bodies emerge, totter, tumble and roll down the hillside as if they were being vomited out of the earth by some strange volcanic force.

I had been behind a machine gun many times, and always with that crazy feeling of being all-powerful, but never with such gruesome results as I experienced during that sunny afternoon.

That moving hand was uncanny. If a few seconds' pressure on the button failed to register a target, the hand would quicken impatiently, and I knew it was I who had failed. I would correct the bead, thrust again, and out would come another bundle

of unbleached wool, another windmill of limbs, another rifle out of action!

The Moors around me chuckled, croaked hoarsely with excitement. It was the most pantomimic performance, as if one had set up so many rag dolls for practice. I plastered lead in a score of places and always drew a target. Hour after hour went by while we raked that slope. The green of the valley was dotted with queer shapes. They draped the crags and bushes.

There were few shots coming over now. Men could emerge from beneath the ridge and bring up more ammunition with considerably less risk than had been ours in the initial ascent. Our solitary automatic gun was mastering the situation.

As the sun dipped towards the skyline the fire from the sharp-shooters suddenly ceased. There came a mysterious silence, an oppressive stillness. What devilishness were they up to now? Or had they all been accounted for?

I stared at the bulky figure of the commander. He was sprawled a yard or so ahead of me, resting on one elbow so as to leave the signalling arm free, staring immovably across the valley. He seemed to stay that way for ages. For all the movement he made he might have been asleep.

I dared not move from my cramped position, but it did occur to me that he was carrying his sorcery a little too far. As time passed I came to the conclusion there was nothing left alive on that slope. Darkness would be upon us if we wasted much more time. At last I could stand it no longer. I

started to rise, keeping steady hands on the gun, with the idea of taking a looksee myself—and up went that gesturing hand.

I flopped down again, took a bead according to the directing paw, and shoved against the button, shattering the silence of the valley with a staccatissimo of explosions. That monocled wonder was too right for words. He had seen movement where no one else could. The digging out of more snipers became almost monotonous before he finally gave the order to cease fire.

We picked up the gun and followed him down the slope to the underside of the ridge. His idea of a joke was to turn out most of the squadron for a thorough investigation of the area, including everything which looked as if it were dead. Perhaps one could not blame him for refusing to take chances. Sometimes these bandits would sham death, though only slightly wounded, in order to carry out some of their devil's tricks.

We advanced along the gulley and up the hillside in open formation, combing every inch of the ground. Some of the bandits were still alive, but we were not taking wounded. We hardly ever took wounded in this queer game of revolt. Nor was the passing of these merely wounded ones swift and merciful—not when those gabbling, gesticulating Moors gathered round.

We collected all manner of guns, knives, antiques, souvenirs, mementos and curios. But that's by the way. Mere routine. What astonished me was to see the Captain, after the squadron had returned to the ridge, coming in with a live prisoner, a wretch

in dusty rags whom he was leading along by the scruff of the neck.

I guess we stared at the spectacle. The prisoner did not appear to be wounded at all. He had escaped our eagle eyes—but not Fernando's. Then I saw that one arm hung limp and there was a streak of dried blood through his scrub of beard. He was under-sized, no longer young, and his rags had once held together as a European suit. He was in fact a Spaniard. Maybe our commander mistook him for the leader of this troublesome mob.

The idea was to question him about the activities of hostile forces around these parts. He was tied up to a stake, wrists and ankles, loosely so that he could be shoved about with the butt of a rifle, or with the butts of three or four rifles, and yet not be able to break away.

Fernando towered over him, fired his questions in clear, clipped sentences, used his monocle on the wretch as if it were a lodestone. The fellow remained sullen. Captain Fernando remained calm, unhurried. His cold jowl never fluttered an extra crease. It might have been chiselled out of alabaster. He fixed the prisoner with that bit of glass and spat queries from the thick line of a mouth that hardly moved.

When after trying for a while he received no response, he merely motioned with his huge paw. Four of the Moors stepped up, started to prod the prisoner in vulnerable places with their rifle-butts. This can be a damnably painful form of torture without seriously injuring the person—at least, for a while.

And these Moors knew all the assailable places from the top of the fellow's head right down to his

broken shoes. Even so, all they could get out of him were ragged grunts. It began to look like stalemate. The man was tough—or stupid with pain. It was difficult to decide.

Fernando tried again. His patience was inexhaustible. It went on and on, this firing of questions and the intervals of prodding. Darkness descended. Camp was pitched. Guards posted. Rations were brought up. Still the treatment continued. This would appear to be the evening's entertainment after a more than usually strenuous day. At all events, that was how the squadron looked upon it.

Those not on duty had gathered round. There could be no better pastime than this. Baiting was meat and drink to them. Nor did they hide their pleasure. As for the commander, he showed neither pleasure nor displeasure. He did not cease his questioning even while he partook of supper.

His was the attitude of an old timer with a task to be completed. Later I was to discover that he could be just as calm and rock-like while playing the role of victim. But that is anticipating. I did not know him then. I merely thought I did.

Frankly I was not concerned about this miserable wretch. Clearly he had a tale to tell and he was a fool not to get it off his chest—and the rifle-butts as well. Instead of which he continued to shake his head sullenly.

Presently Captain Fernando changed his tactics. He walked over to his saddle harness, drew out his sword, played a while with the keen blade, bending it this way and that, as if its workmanship pleased him intensely—though it was the manipulation by

his powerful hands rather than any movement of his cold features which gave one that impression.

Then he faced the prisoner, pointed the blade at the fellow's throat, drew it down the front of his body with infinite care, so that one saw the clothes peel miraculously away from the sullen figure, baring the chest and exposing the thinnest line of crimson down the dirty torso. Neat, if a little painful.

More questions in that harsh, clipped voice, a raising of the fellow's chin with the tip of the sword, so that the two saw eye to eye, the very finesse of torturous persuasion, pressure on the chin, compelling the victim to fall back against the stake in the vain hope of relief. Even then the only sign was a harsh breathing through the teeth, an instinctive, animal shrinking from the glistening point.

It was still going on when I went off duty for a brief rest. When I returned to the scene after sleeping, they were using drag-ropes. The commander was stretched out on his blankets in sound sleep. He had given his orders before retiring. It seemed there were relays of torturers and baiters. But nothing happened.

We moved out at dawn and took the prisoner with us. He went ahead in the care of a couple of Moors. They were mounted, of course, but he was compelled to trot alongside on his own hoofs. I'd once had a taste of that sort of thing, only I passed out more quickly than this fellow. I guess I wasn't so tough. There was a halter round his neck, a slip-knot of rope, the other end of which was secured to a saddle of one of the mounts.

We rode in this way for miles, in and about the

green gulleys, searching, always searching. It was a beautiful morning. The sun was not yet too hot. Patches of gold-tipped cumulus drifted across the blue dome. I wondered how long we should keep up this game. Our rations were running short, and though there were fruits in abundance everywhere around us, we could not live on the country indefinitely.

Apparently Captain Fernando intended to hang on to his prisoner until he did reveal the hide-out of the hostile force which was behind all this sniping and harassing of the camps and villages. My guess was that the fellow would pass out before he opened his mouth.

The valley opened out to a wide plateau of arable land. In the distance was an Arab farmstead. We rode towards it. It was then approaching high noon and the sun was beginning to burn. There would be a chance of a rest in the orchard while the mounts were fed.

We were riding along a cart track when the prisoner suddenly pitched forward, drawing the rope taut around his neck, but the Moor on his near side was too quick. He leapt from the saddle on to the fellow's back and swiftly drew the slip-knot loose again. The attempt at suicide had failed.

A pail of water was brought up and thrown over the prisoner as he lay on the ground. He sat up, shook himself, stared miserably around. Rations were handed to him and a guard stood over him while he ate. He was not to die.

It was then that I noticed our commander's interest in the farmstead. What significance was there about

the prisoner's attempt at self-strangulation at this particular spot? Had this farm anything to do with it?

Fernando seemed to think there might be some connection. He organised a search. We roamed over the fields, in and out of the buildings, and thence to the farmhouse itself.

The farmer was an Arab, ancient, grey-haired, seamed and lined, with a skin the colour of the soil he tilled. There were three wives, a multitude of children, and perhaps a score of labourers. It all looked innocent enough—until we started turning things over.

The women and girls followed us about as we proceeded methodically from room to room, chattering, smiling, offering themselves in a manner that was a shade too friendly. These country Arabs, thought I, are as brave as they make 'em and as shameless as wild swine. Their behaviour gave us the impression they had something to hide. It was too artful for words.

The Captain had disappeared. Jenkins opined that he had a passion for females of school age. Maybe he was right. Opportunities were not lacking. These smiling, gesticulating wenches were the very devil. The more they clung, the more certain I became that here could be found something to help us in our search.

Things warmed up when we entered a great rambling barn which stood off from the main building. The wenches showed more anxiety in their desire to please us. One plump and coarse creature offered all she could for my amusement. I wasn't interested.

The barn was stacked with corn and roots. It was a great lofty structure and the interior was somewhat dark after the glaring light outside. We stared at the stacked produce until our eyes grew accustomed to the gloom.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Jenkins, "there's enough corn and turnips here to sink a ship!"

"That's what I thought—supposing that stuff goes right back to the walls."

"Yeah. I get you."

One of the women threw her arms about Jenks. He picked her up and threw her across the barn. She dropped like a sack of coals. I guess she was astonished at that. But we had seen through their stupid behaviour. I turned to Ahmad the Jackal at my elbow and explained what we wanted done. He went away, chuckling like a parrot over sugar—and returned in a breathless minute or so with a party of Moors.

They set to work on the neatly stacked produce. It was no light task for the pile reached almost to the rafters. By this time the women were in a frenzy of excitement, all yapping at once, begging us not to destroy their means of livelihood in this way.

In a few minutes the place was in an uproar. The wenches were imploring us, with dirty outstretched talons, not to commit this outrage. We were destroying the labour of a year. They were foaming at the mouth with excitement, not to say terror.

"Now we know why that Spaniard tried to strangle himself!"

"Sure! He didn't want these folks to get the impression it was he who led us to this farm, huh?"

I nodded. But the poor devil hadn't led us anywhere. It was a sheer accident that we should choose this place for rest and rations. The fellow just happened to be with us.

At that moment the old farmer appeared in the doorway. When he saw what was happening he threw up his hands and swore before Allah that there was nothing in his barn to interest us. If it was fodder we required, there was plenty for our mounts and surely no need to throw his produce all over the place in this reckless fashion. He would give, give, give! He protested that he was a peace-loving farmer who desired nothing better than the protection of the good Spanish soldiers.

Captain Fernando appeared. He stood listening to the farmer and staring calmly round, taking in the significance of the situation. I glanced at him. He nodded his head ever so slightly. That fellow could do more by means of nods and gestures than any other man alive. The next moment the old man found himself on his ear in the middle of the yard. Troops rushed at him, dragged him to one of his own posts, tied him up.

A pile of material had been thrown aside, revealing neatly stacked rifles and cases of ammunition.

Somebody was doing a trifle of gun-running around these parts. The place was a veritable armoury! Apparently it had been used as a secret warehouse by the troublesome bandits or loyalists or both. Here were German Mausers, English Springfields and

Enfields, and the dismantled parts of a number of machine guns, French mitrailleuse pattern. Clearly a find of some importance, since these pretty weapons were being stored against the time when they could be issued and used against us in some revolt or other!

I looked at the Arab women and girls. They had ceased their screamings. They were crouched down by the wall of the barn, too scared now to move, nine of them, bunched together like frightened rabbits. They had the look of condemned prisoners awaiting execution. The faces of the younger girls were working with terror, their velvet-black eyes shrunk to pin-points, pitiful mouths twitching. They believed their hour had come.

While the remainder of the buildings were searched, others brought up a wagon and the arms were loaded into it. The inhabitants were rounded up—a score of youths and men, fifteen women and children. They made an interesting picture in that sunlit yard. But they were dull, dull as ditchwater. Not one of them had a word to say. Whether they had all known about the secret store, it was difficult to decide. Certainly the women and most of the girls had known about the gun-running activities.

The old farmer was as tight-lipped as the rest of them. When he was confronted with our Spanish prisoner he let out a roar. Then he blasphemed the luckless one until the foam speckled his grey beard. The Spaniard merely stared sullenly at the farmer. I guess he realised that any sort of explanation would be useless. He was a traitor in the eyes of the old

timer, and the vile accusations spat upon him were more dreadful than all the tortures he had endured.

The whole mob was turned into the now empty barn and a strong guard placed over them. Our commander was of the opinion that sooner or later a party would come along to draw stores, possibly during the dark hours of night. He proposed to stay in the hope of making a further round-up. He was a regular glutton for excitement, though he was never excited.

I guessed there was some scheme in his mind when he ordered one of the younger girls to be brought to him. She came across the yard to the shady corner where we were lounging on saddle packs. I had not noticed her before and I gazed now with interest. She was smiling. She was perfectly happy. One could imagine a girl walking up to a boy friend in just the way she stepped up to the Captain.

I glanced at Jenkins. His mouth was twisted into a sly grin, an expression which spoke volumes. We had seen the interrogative gesture the girl had made, and the Captain's negative movement. This then was the little girl who had been responsible for the commander's temporary absence while we were searching the place. They certainly got along like a house on fire, those two.

The girl could not have been more than thirteen or fourteen, though for an Arab that is full maturity. Just the same, she was very much a little girl in our eyes. She had jet-black hair, a round soft face with unusually small features—except her eyes, which were big and brown and as soft as those of a gazelle.

So that she was no thoroughbred Arabian. She might have been from the Riff, or she might have been just a half-caste. It was difficult to determine. But she was undeniably attractive in that long, close-fitting white aba that reached almost to her brown ankles.

The Captain was conversing with her in her own patois. She was curled up at his feet, staring in fascination at the bit of glass in that heavy jowl. Neither Jenks nor I could follow the conversation. The lingo was above our heads. But it was obvious the girl was refusing to answer his questions.

"He's trying to pump her, I guess," opined Jenks. "That love business is one way of getting the information he requires, huh."

"Trying to find out when the next lot of bandits are expected."

"Sure! I get you, buddy. And we're going to lie in wait for them—once he finds out when to expect them."

That appeared about the size of the situation. By this time the girl was seated in Fernando's lap. He was fondling her as if, for all the world, she were his youngest daughter. Truly a happy picture for drowsy soldiers resting in the shade of the courtyard of that farm on a sunny afternoon.

They chatted and laughed together in the most amicable fashion. Then the questioning would begin again. Captain Fernando was the soul of patience. But he did not appear to be making much headway. The girl would shrug her shoulders, smile sweetly, displaying sharp white teeth. Evidently she was not going to give her friends, or relatives,

away, not even to please this giant of a lover with the magnetic glass sunk in his face.

Presently the Captain climbed to his feet and strode across the yard towards the farmhouse, the little girl trotting at his heels. One gathered that he could be as shameless as any of these unveiled country Arabs when it came to a problem of obtaining valuable information!

What happened within that house was known only to the man and the girl, but it was not the first time that such a subterfuge had been used in the interests of love—and war.

They did not emerge again until sunset. Jenks and I were busy posting guards for the night. In a few clipped, concise sentences, our commander explained his plan of action. He had obviously succeeded in his blandishments. He had scored to some purpose. Not only had he obtained the information he wanted, he secured the girl as decoy!

Henceforth she was a spy working for the nationalists. She was on our hands until we reached Arzila again. This child of thirteen summers was the most important unit of our strength. A bunch of loyalists were expected that very night! The usual procedure was for them to appear round about midnight and wait for a signal which would tell them all was clear. Then they would march up and collect what they required from the arsenal.

The signal would be given by Zarah—which was not the little girl's name, but it will serve. As the signal was usually given by one of the women, the loyalists would be drawn into the trap without their

suspicious being roused. It was all beautifully simple, and sufficiently out of the usual routine to load us up with anticipatory thrills of excitement.

The inhabitants of the farmstead were all under armed guard and stowed away in the barn. The remainder of the squadron, about one hundred and eighty men, were posted in a wide circle around the farm buildings, each man lying concealed in the fields and about the shadowy buildings.

The Captain took up his position in the farmhouse with Zarah. He was not taking any risks. He had warned the girl that at the first sign of treachery—she would be riddled with bullets from his own pistol. She had protested at this lack of faith in her given word, protested with tears in her big brown eyes. She had been comforted. All was well. But the officer kept his gun at the ready just the same. So much for love.

It was a moonless night. A myriad stars twinkled in the blue-black dome. Two hours to midnight and all was set. There came a weird stillness about that shadowy cluster of buildings. I lay in a furrow some few yards from the cart track by which the visitors would approach the farm, lay and stared up at the twinkling stars, wondering what eerie world was this into which I'd fallen.

Not a sound disturbed that strange nocturnal scene as the minutes dragged slowly by—except once, I remember, when a cock crowed—disturbed perhaps by some prowling rodent. But the crow was like a savage scream in that unearthly silence, jangling the nerves. Then silence again, a long,

unendurable stillness while we waited and watched for the coming of the loyalists.

A mere episode in the tale of the historic Spanish Legion Revolt in Morocco, perchance, but it had quite far-reaching effects.

CHAPTER VIII

WOMAN'S PLACE IN WAR

LYING in that furrowed soil for a couple of hours waiting for the whistle that would send us into action was something of a nerve strain. One had to keep awake. That wasn't so bad as it may seem. I never felt so much awake. I was keyed up. I kept thinking about Zarah, for some reason, picturing her, imagining just how she would behave when the fun began.

That slip of a creature had got in my hair. She held the destinies of some two hundred men in her little hands. Would she slip? About four feet, three inches, and all she had to do was to signal at midnight, signal the all-clear. A dark, silent, empty night, an empty mind, so what else could I think about whilst I lay there but that little chit with the lovely brown eyes and the sort of baby smile that sends a man crazy?

I sat up, peered through the gloom. There wasn't a movement anywhere—just dim, shadowy shapes of buildings, a black patch that marked the orchard, the farmhouse with its typical verandah of Moorish design, horse-shoe arches, and the gables, above which rose the round towers like small minarets.

Only two people in there, the hefty wallah with a bit of glass in his jowl and that little girl. Was he still sitting there, like a blessed statue, with his Mauser

cocked? No empire would fall because of a woman where Fernando the Great was concerned. He belonged to a line of old Spanish grandees. They've stopped making 'em that way now. Too many revolts have destroyed the mould, I guess.

I was suddenly tense. Movement over there. Somebody was crawling on all-fours across the cart track towards me. It was Jenkins, damn him!

"Where in hell are you going?"

"Terry, my lad, if there's anything I hate, it's sitting around waiting for trouble. I'm fed to the back teeth. . . ."

"What time is it?"

"Just after eleven."

"Suffering Pete! I thought it must be close on midnight."

"Yeah. That's just how I felt. . . . Wonder what old Fernando is doing in there. . . ."

Funny how taut nerves swing a man's thoughts around women. This scrap of conversation in the dead of night has no further significance than that. I guess men are all very much of a muchness, that is, ordinary men like Jenks and myself. We sat still, side by side, and thought. There didn't seem anything more to say.

A stillness, like passing away, had taken hold of the world around us. Uncanny. We were the only two English-speaking guys in that mess of trouble.

There is a different quality, a different atmosphere about the darkness of Morocco, about all Africa maybe. It is strange, more profound. It seems massive, fluid with terrible possibilities. There were

occasions, after Jenkins had returned across the track to his post, when I felt I couldn't stand the smell of it much longer. Perhaps it was my nerves, but the night had a sensual, blood smell. I was surprised to find my face sweaty. Must have been the hot, fecund darkness that had got into my blood. It was an environment that bred queer thoughts, crazy fancies.

There followed dismal swamps of silence and heat. I lived ten eons in those two hours of thick darkness. How long, O, Lord, how long!

I rolled over on my back, stared at the black sky. There was movement up there, a splash of opaque light where the stars clustered thickly. A distant sound broke through my absorption. I rolled to my rifle, peered down the cart track. It was not imagination. My head was close to the ground. I could hear the muffled thud of feet, many feet. They were coming!

Those thudding feet were coming nearer, nearer. There was a thudding in my chest then, as if in unison with the thud of the oncoming feet. Thud, thud, thud. It was beating in my ears. I did not realise at the time that, lying on the ground as I was with my head in the dirt, the sound would be somewhat intensified. I fancied they were on top of me when they were still half a mile away.

Yes, I guess I was a bit screwy that night. But I can still feel the pressure of that memory, still see the ghostly shapes of moving figures looming up through the glowering blackness of the night.

From where I lay and watched, squinting obliquely down the track, it seemed a scarifying spectacle, a

grim and sullen thing, a march of the dead in the dead of night. There was no other sound, nothing at all but that dull, monotonous crunch of feet, which, to my heightened senses, seemed to leap in and out of the ruts of the track.

It came on, that sullen column, drew level with my eyes, staggered past, while I lay and peered in fascination at legs and feet. And some of them were women's legs, women's feet. In my distorted view they seemed weary and dispirited, feet moving more or less in step, but bodies swaying drunkenly, like corn-stalks in the breeze.

I raised my head cautiously as they tailed by. There must have been fifty or more. They moved like automatons. Within six or seven hundred yards of the gate leading into the courtyard they halted—though I had heard no order given.

I stared up at the shadowy farmhouse. Zarah had appeared on the verandah. She seemed to stand there for a minute, hesitating, a slim white figure silhouetted against the dark background of the house. Then she raised the flag, the flag of the loyalists, blood-red with the hammer and sickle in the corner. She raised it, lowered it, raised it again, in a very definite sort of signal. Then she disappeared from the verandah.

Instantly the silence was broken. Apparently they thought there was no further need for caution. The whole party trooped into the courtyard, and the darkness was suddenly alive with their chattering and laughing. They were yelling greetings at the house, crying for the farmer and his friends.

The door of the farmhouse opened, revealing the

giant figure of a man against the background of the lighted interior. A flash of light caught his monocle. There was a gun in his huge paw. A swift movement to his mouth and then a piercing whistle rent the air.

The babble of the loyalists was momentarily silenced, cut off in mid-speech, as it were. They seemed to hesitate, staring about in confusion. They saw a great circle of troops advancing upon them from all quarters of the compass. The manœuvre had taken them by surprise—as our commander had planned that it should. There was another blast of the whistle. We charged.

“We have been betrayed!” they yelled. “We have been betrayed!”

As I recall it, the moment was quite dramatic. Yells of rage rose upon all sides, rose higher and higher into a scarifying roar. Above the tumult a voice, a woman's voice, was screeching:

“To arms! To arms!”

The loyalists, rendered desperate by the trap into which they had fallen, dashed about in the wildest confusion. Only a few of them were armed, and these began firing blindly, perhaps with the idea of blazing a way through the ring of troops which hemmed them in. But there wasn't a chance for those unlucky devils. A stream of bullets met them at every angle, forcing them back in a confused heap, screaming with rage and pain.

Hardly one of them escaped that deadly shower of hot lead. Soon the night was hideous with their cries. They didn't have a dog's chance. They went down in heaps, men and women in a scrambling

mass, trying to hide from certain death beneath the bodies of their comrades. Moans and curses, cries of pain and yelps of horror, from right and left, from front and rear. There was no escape from that circle of rapid musketry fire as the squadron closed in on them.

It was too easy. I could actually stand off and watch. It seemed there was nothing but a heaped-up, scrambling mass of men and women in the gloom of that courtyard. It was an appalling spectacle. It was wholesale slaughter. It was murder en masse. It was sheer, gluttonish lust.

Fire poured down in a withering stream from the balcony above the struggling mob. A big man and a little girl were pot-shotting from the superiority of their position up there and apparently enjoying the bloody game.

The slaughter went on. Wounded and dead were filled with slugs where they lay. At least, the continuous fire had the effect of putting them out of their misery. By dawn there was hardly a moan left in the whole bunch of them.

And such a dawn! The farmyard had become a graveyard. Bodies of men and women lay about, athwart each other, grisly, indecent shapes, some of them with their faces in the dirt, their arms and legs crumpled up, women with their funereal clothes torn and bedraggled, youths whose faces had been shot to pieces.

Captain Fernando went around the yard, turning them over with his foot. He discovered seven of them still alive, seven with only minor wounds, for they had been hidden under a mound of dead. He

had them dragged out, three wretched women and four equally wretched men. They were filed up against the wall of the barn and peppered with shot, and even then one of the women, as she slithered to her knees, could make a rude gesture at the Captain.

There they were, a mass of dead. In a few hours they would stink to high heaven. Something had to be done about them. Fernando the Great had his own ideas about that. He had the prisoners turned out of the barn and lined up.

They came, the men sullenly, the women wailing and screaming, the children crying piteously at the sight of the dead that cluttered the farmyard. Our commander stood and gazed coldly upon them, then he pointed up to the balcony where Zarah stood, calmly surveying the scene. I gathered he was telling the straggling group of prisoners that they could either join his forces and live in peace under the new government, or follow the same route as the loyalists.

I did not follow his reasoning, for he was not the sort of guy who would take chances with these treacherous folk. The old farmer, perhaps because he did not believe the offer was genuine, told the Captain where he could go. For that the old timer was promptly beheaded.

The remainder of the men walked over and offered their allegiance to the might of Spain. They were whipped into line and supplied with shovels. Their first job under the new authority was to dig a long trench. This they did under the watchful eyes of an armed guard. Then they collected the dead and threw them into the trench. Mopping up took the

better part of the day. Women worked too, bringing up mules and wagons, collecting stores, household goods, stowing every scrap of fodder and produce into the carts. The contents of the farmhouse, outbuildings and barns were confiscated for transportation to Arzila. We were to leave an empty farmstead behind.

"By Allah! It is good to sit and watch these devils work," grinned Ahmad the Jackal.

He was seated by my side in the shade of the barn—the rascal contrived somehow never to be far from my side. The Captain had disappeared again. So had Zarah. They seemed to have taken possession of the farmer's abode. What a rag-time army, thought I. Most of the squadron were walking around with rifles slung, keeping an eye on the fatigue parties. Jenkins was supervising the filling in of an elongated grave, much as a foreman engineer might superintend the work of excavators.

It was the most commonplace scene. No one could have imagined from the matter-of-fact air about the place that more than fifty men and women had gone to their Maker within the past few hours. A molten sun poured intense heat down upon a scene of peaceful bustle and activity.

"Zarah is beautiful, señor?"

There was a crafty look in the eyes of Ahmad the Jackal. I had seen just that expression before. His thick lips broke into a wide-toothed grin.

"But there is one other, señor, who is even more beautiful."

I gathered that Ahmad the Jackal was endeavouring to put me on to a good thing. It was a way he had.

After that he remained inarticulate for a spell. This consideration of a woman was too much for him, quite beyond his ken. Inshalla! He would rest until the señor gave orders. These white men from across the waters were quite mad.

Somebody once said we are all faced by circumstances, not by moral precepts. The line came into my head during that hot afternoon. I bade the woman Fatima be seated and plied her with questions about her home in the mountains. She was a friendly soul, just then, and talked freely enough.

An ordinary enough story. She was one of fourteen children—too many mouths to feed in that poor mud village in the mountains. I had seen just such homes in the Atlas. Once, on a trek from Marrakesh into the mountains, I had lived for a spell amongst her clan, shared one of the tall rectangular boxes of mud with a square aperture for window which the people called houses, habitations more primitive than any to be found in Central Africa, yet not more than two hundred miles from the Atlantic coast.

It seemed years since I was there, trekking those mountains for gold-speckled quartz and amethyst, loading mule packs with our finds, and then trekking back to the coast. Not a very adventurous trek, perhaps, but it was good fun. The talk with Fatima brought it all back to me, the sound of her voice raised many a pleasing picture of those days. Fatima, like hundreds more of her sisters from the Atlas, had migrated in search of richer fields to conquer.

It pleased her mightily that I could talk of her home and her people away in the mountains. I guess we

became as friendly then as two such widely differing people could. She had the greatest contempt for the Moorish Arabs, especially those who enlisted in the armies of the Spanish and the French. Even with me she could not hide her feelings—maybe she thought I had some fellow feeling, since I was neither Spanish nor French but a freebooter from the lands across the sea. Her folk were of sturdier stock than these wily Moors.

Later, when Captain Fernando had decided that we should not start the trek for Arzila until the morrow's dawn, and we had settled down for the night, Fatima appeared again, still smiling. She seemed pretty sure this was just what I would expect of her, also she wanted to talk again of her beloved mountains. We found a corner of our own in that cluster of habitations. I imagine there was a lot of pairing off. It was always a relief to forget war and revolt and sickening, senseless bloodshed.

The bronze features softened surprisingly when she talked of the mountains, the black lustrous eyes came alive, radiating sympathy as they peered into mine. In the soft glow of that lamp-lit shack she became an entirely different creature. She had loosened her hair. It was luxuriant, like everything else about her, strong as that of a youth, virile, black and glossy.

She smiled in a strange, challenging sort of way, displaying teeth white and translucent as pearl, lips curled back like the petals of the hibiscus flower. I stared at the three lines of tattoo dots that ran down from her chin along the firm flesh of neck and breast. It was fascinating to trace the lines from moulded



A VILLAGE OF NID HOUSES IN THE ALPS MOUNTAINS

some benighted reason. I picked up the woman's clothes and threw them towards her.

"Put them on! Quickly! Quickly!"

As she was climbing into them the door burst open and Jenkins rushed in.

"Hey, Terry! Jump to it, for the love of Pete! There's another mob coming up the track!"

"Another? Who are they?"

"How in hell should I know! Bandits, thugs, or loyalists—it's all the same to us, ain't it? We're all pillagers, scavengers and murderers around these parts. Come on, buddy. Step on it."

We rushed out to our posts in the courtyard. It must then have been around three of the morning. This mob, whoever they were, had sprung a surprise upon us. There was no time for setting traps this time. The sentries had given the alarm and the Captain had acted without delay. That blast of his whistle had warned the visiting party that all was far from well in this centre of gun-running activities.

They had pulled up in alarm. There was a challenge. They replied with a flurry of shots. After which there could be no question as to the reason for their presence. Captain Fernando raced around, booting sleepy men into action. In a few moments the battle was on. The mob had dropped into the furrows and were firing rapid volleys into us.

These were no loyalists come to seek arms for the good of the cause. They were well-armed bandits come to steal arms and anything else they could lay their claws upon. And they had settled down to fight. Fernando the Great, however, decided other-

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wise. Once let the devils settle in and we should waste precious hours and lose many men driving 'em out.

The whole squadron was turned out by this time. They moved automatically to the blasts of the whistle. Then the order was given to charge. We raced across the yard and into the fields, firing from snap and bawling fit to beat the band. It was a crazy staggering charge over those furrows and ruts of the ploughed fields, but a short one.

In a few seconds we had engaged them, slashing, lunging, sticking, parrying—a perfectly putrid close-up with yelling men jabbing at each other in the darkness. I guess those bandits hadn't realised they were to face a full squadron of trained Moroccan cavalrymen. I don't know what they had anticipated. They certainly tried to stick it out, even when they knew they were hopelessly outnumbered.

They had guts, those blighters who came out of the darkness to disturb our first promising night of pleasure and rest in weeks. But that didn't help them any. They faced an equally ferocious mob and of greater number.

In a few minutes we had them completely surrounded. . . . Thereafter wholesale butchery, a fiendish slaughter while the luckless devils called in vain to Allah for help. We rounded up about seventy. A gory finale to a most promising night. I was by no means the only guy whose recreations had been rudely interrupted. . . . And when men vent their spleen with bayonets dipped in venom the resulting scene is not a nice one to describe. Such bloodthirsty savagery goes beyond the limits of description.

We rode away at dawn, with our women and wagons full of loot, leaving behind an empty farmstead, empty, that is, except for the mutilated dead lying about the fields, eloquent warning to other hostile forces who might pass this way in search of arms.

"Of all the crazy countries . . ." snorted Jenkins.

CHAPTER IX

SPAWN OF THE DEVIL

BLOOD spills very easily. It may be difficult for the stay-at-home to accept the fact that blood-spilling can become commonplace. But the time comes when the sight of gushing blood is no longer a matter of stomach trouble.

In Tetuan, for instance, that mystery capital of the Spanish Zone in Morocco, the blood feud was a feature of historical pride. The city has been the gathering ground for every type of ruffian since the days of the Barbary pirates.

Its very composition makes it an ideal centre for the apache, the thug and the killer who kills for killing's sake. In one respect, and one only, it is like the city of Fez in the French protectorate, hemmed in by mountains and standing on rising ground. But it has not the same beautifully green landscape surrounding it.

My chief impressions were of suks, mosques, and cemeteries—and the buildings have been so erected that the picturesqueness has been frightfully overdone, since the place is a complicated mass of tortuous, vaulted alleyways, containing more dark and tragic holes and corners than any other city on earth.

One cannot patrol these stinking byways after dusk without gaining the impression that here, at any moment, are the ideal settings for murder and

sudden death. Even in the daytime, while the hot breath of a brilliant sun pours down upon the ancient city, these dirty alleys are overcast by the sombre shadows of the buildings which threaten to cave in upon each other.

The place is full of the ferocious-looking, stockily-built Berber mountaineers. But the trouble is not so much from them as from the knives and guns of the alley rats who scarcely ever come out into the sunlight.

Patrolling those quarters during the days of revolt was something of a trial. One never knew what to expect around the next dark and sinister corner. We would round a bend from one lane into another, catch a glimpse of a group of men and women melting away, slinking like rats into their holes—and there would be the knifed body of a *Légionnaire* or a Moroccan trooper. Most of his clothing stolen, his money and all his private possessions gone.

Sometimes a *Légionnaire* or a Moor would give them more than they bargained for. The sound of shots would bring us up at the double. The *Légionnaire* would be standing firm under a shower of knives while his barking gun laid men and women out in rows. We left the alley rats to clean up their own dead. Our concern was for the troops only.

No trick was too scurvy for that hellish quarter. It did not matter whether the victim were a Moor with no more than ten pesetas to jingle, or a Spanish trooper with twenty. Every lone soldier was fair game.

At the door of some hovel would lounge a black-eyed wench of uncertain pedigree. When the soldier

hove in sight the wench leapt, snatched his cap and dashed indoors with a squeal of laughter. The soldier ran after his headgear, naturally. He would then find himself stumbling down a dark passage in the house—but not very far. The stealthy knife thrust always laid him low. After the body had been rifled it was tossed into the alley, where a patrol would tumble over it.

What a happy hunting ground during the time of the Revolt! Cleaning up the victims became monotonous. It was no good searching the nearby hovels. There was nothing there, except filth. The rats had gone to earth, leaving behind moaning womenfolk who told piteous tales of brutal treatment and starvation.

Some of the suks, or native bazaars, were nothing but narrow alleys roofed over with matting and reeds, and once the shops and booths were closed, these places were just pitch-black tunnels.

Ahmad the Jackal went into the quarter alone one afternoon. He was the sort of rodent who could go anywhere like that and feel at home. But after he had been missing for twenty-four hours, I thought it about time something was done. He would not be an easy victim. He knew all the tricks, having invented many of them himself. I didn't want to lose him. He was too useful to Jenkins and myself, and we thought he should return home.

We set out to look for him the following afternoon, patrolling the suks with a wary eye. The dim coolness of the suks was welcome after the hot glare without. Here and there the sun poured through the broken matting, making a patterned network



A CORNER OF THE SUK FOR COPPER WARE

of light and shade on the unpaved ground that had been trodden hard by countless feet.

Much of what we saw was innocent enough—in the daytime. There was the usual throng pushing and jostling each other in two opposite streams, the chaffering, gesticulating groups about the stalls and round the native cafés. Old men sat on their haunches in the dirt and puffed dreamily at their long-stemmed pipes of hashish, women enveloped in unbleached woollen garments which covered them from head to toe, with only a narrow slit for their sparkling black eyes, shuffled in and about the vociferous concourse, the strident voices of ragged urchins rose above the murmuring, throbbing sound.

If I had remained in Tetuan half my life I should never have mastered that labyrinthine mass of lanes which twist interminably in a distorted confusion of angles, arches and tunnels. We left the covered alleys of the suks for the more open thoroughfares. The setting sun was turning the façades of the dirty white buildings a brownish pink. Shafts of light splashed the narrow streets. Then the sun dropped behind the mountain barrier and the quarter was suddenly dimmed and stilled.

Those dark alleys gave one a fugitive feeling, as if one's movements were being watched by many eyes. There were no windows in the dirty white walls—those faced inwards on to the seclusion of courtyards—nothing but shadowy horseshoe arches linking one flat-roofed building with another, in which one saw dim outlines, furtive shapes. Family life here, as elsewhere in Morocco, is lived behind blank walls. The native of Maroc shuts his

house. His wife shutters her face. But how convenient for the killer!

Somewhere behind this sinister, hermetic seclusion was the rascal Amad the Jackal. Even then I did not feel any concern for him; but while he had been absent before, it had been for but a short period—certainly not the whole of a night and a day.

Maybe we were just curious as to what new discoveries he had made. I can see now that some such notion must have been at the back of our minds. I cannot imagine either of us being terribly troubled about his welfare.

Treading the murky alleys gave one the impression of a sullen, half-suppressed tension, an undercurrent of lurking tragedy, an atmosphere choked with an ensanguined, non-stop programme of evil intent.

There was a definite type of slinking individual in that area. He was neither Berber, Riffian, nor Moor, but just plain Latin hoodlum. His like is to be found in most Mediterranean ports, such as the Quartier Reserve of Marseilles. He wears dark European clothes of a tight-fitting, old fashioned kind, and a cloth cap.

In the quarter of Tetuan we learned to be very wary of those cloth caps. More than one Légionnaire had been picked up with his face slashed in ribbons. When the hoodlum raised a hand to whip off his cloth cap, it was time to yank out a gun. There were razor blades secured into the peaks of those cloth caps.

We had a vague idea as to where we might find Ahmad the Jackal. There was a certain house in this region of vice haunts. I guess it took us a

long time to locate it. We trudged around hour after hour. Occasionally there was trouble with a pair of glittering eyes—set in the crest of a fleeting black shape, a suggestive giggle in the darkness, the staring green eyes that seemed to be on the ground and turned out to be nothing more harmful than the phosphorescent orbs of a startled cat, a sudden flash of light from a hastily-opened door, the thrusting of a drunken shape into the street—over which we lifted our feet and passed on. It was a weird progress we made.

All at once, as we rounded a corner, we heard the unmistakable sounds of fighting and saw a small group about an archway from which came a soft beam of light. A nondescript circle of men and women, ten or a dozen of them, stood watching two women battle to the death. An amazing scene, for no one spoke above a ragged mutter. They were content it seemed to look on. The sight appealed to some primordial instinct in their animal natures. They just feasted their lustful eyes upon the bestial struggle.

Perhaps the two combatants made noise enough. Occasionally they would break away, stand and croak like demons at each other, then close again, wreaking bloody havoc upon each other with their horny hands, fingers outspread after the manner of a vulture's talons. They crouched at elbow-length, their clothes hanging in shreds, for they were naked almost to the waist, eyes, ears, noses, breasts torn and bleeding, hair hanging in snakey tangles.

When they closed they were become just a mass of wriggling arms and legs, clawing hands, panting,

foaming mouths, striving to tear, to reach up for the strangle-hold, to gouge, to clutch a hank of hair. Their bare feet hardly made a sound on the unpaved floor of the alley as they shuffled and lurched from side to side. Once they had closed the whole sickening progress was astonishingly soundless.

A knee shot up, reaching the other's abdomen with the force of a pile-driver. She went down, but instinctively she had clutched at the remnants of her skirts and drawn them up over breasts and face. We slipped away into the darkness as the other woman stooped over the fallen foe and started to claw insanely at the unprotected limbs. We had no desire to be in at the death. Tough as we considered ourselves, we had little stomach for that sort of fighting.

"Gee, buddy! I'd rather fight ten men than face one of those clawing wenches!"

My sentiments too. But you can't get away from feminine force in Spanish Morocco. The women are back of everything. When they are not actively engaged in revolt against something or other, they appear to spend their time practising on each other. But fight they must. It is a matter of heredity and tradition.

The moon had risen by this time. The dirty white stucco had turned a weird silvery green. Fitful beams of light lay athwart the dark alleys. Impish shafts of spot-light struck shadowy arches, played hide-and-seek over parapets, battlemented roofs, domes and minarets.

Dark flitting figures were suddenly illumined as they glided across the pools of light. In this nether-

most Gehenna the patches of moonlight gave the quarter an even more eerie look.

As we trekked around the winding lanes all sound seemed to die away. A deathly stillness fell over the world, as it sometimes does when a storm approaches, only there was no storm in the offing, certainly not one of an atmospheric nature.

We came at last to the house we had suspected. We heard music and voices as we mounted the zig-zag street. It was in strange contrast to the death-like stillness we had left below. Up here was the rising buzz of many tongues. Tails of light showed down the vaulted passages. Doors were open. Women were silhouetted against the background of lighted interiors. Cafés with open fronts or partially veiled by coloured curtains were packed with a conglomeration of Arabs, Jews, and Spaniards.

We pushed through a curtained archway and down a passage and found ourselves in a lofty patio with a balcony running round it. In this open courtyard the moon had full play, making the place almost as light as day.

A giant negro strode across the yard towards us. He was inclined to be truculent until he saw who we were. We gave him the reason for our presence there in a few words. He beckoned and we followed him up the narrow stone steps to the balcony off which opened many curtained alcoves.

We had drawn our Mausers. It was our unhealthy job to search each one of these secluded recesses. A buzz of voices, laughter, stifled feminine shrieks, muffled oaths came from behind those closed curtains. The first archway was luxuriously

hung with heavy brocade in a bizarre pattern of crimson and gold. Somebody trying to be patriotic, I thought, for these were the colours of the new Nationalist flag.

We tore the curtains aside and stepped forward. Startled squeals greeted us. The room was large, the walls draped with rugs and silks. Coloured lamps hung from the ceiling. Along one side was a low divan of Moorish design piled high with a profusion of rich cushions.

Four women sprawled there in various states of semi-nudity—limbs of ebony, amber and cream hardly covered by the gaudy silken raiment. We appeared to have interrupted some sort of amusement in which they indulged among themselves. There didn't seem to be a sign of anything which would lead us to the rascal Ahmad the Jackal. But certainly this garish abode was about his measurement.

All the women, once they had recovered from the shock of this sudden intrusion, began to yap at once. They saw our uniforms, our insignia of rank, and especially our guns, and were not happy. These turbaned nymphs in disarray wished to know the meaning of our presence. Clearly ours was an official visit. What, in brief, did we want with them? We searched the place from top to bottom, turned over the divan, spilling a pile of scented, colourful cushions—but without success.

We were about to take our leave when I saw something which made me swing round again and clutch at the shoulder of one of the girls.

"Where did you get that?"

The girl struggled and squealed, but I held on. A Moorish Arab, I guessed, of seventeen or thereabouts, tall, slender, with a sun-painted skin, well-shaped head wrapped in a turban of scarlet silk that did not cover all of her shining black hair, beads of jet for eyes, thick lips, blood red like an open wound, rounded as a purple passion fruit, despite her slender build.

The pantaloons of yellow silk scarcely reached her hips. Her one other garment was a tiny embroidered waistcoat. She might have stepped out of the pages of the Arabian Nights Entertainments. But all that was merely stock-in-trade. What had intrigued me was the tiny silver dagger that hung around her honey-coloured neck. I had seen just such a trinket many times before—wrapped around the wrist of one Ahmad the Jackal.

To him it was a talisman, a charm in which he had the greatest faith and from which he was never separated. Had this girl separated him from his beloved amulet? If so—how? Or was it a duplicate? Was it one of a number of such trinkets? Certainly I had never seen its like before. It looked like the beginning of a first-class mystery to me.

“What’s on?” queried Jenkins.

I pointed to the talisman.

“That belonged to Ahmad the Jackal.”

Jenkins stared.

“Sure! I remember. How in hell did she get it?”

“I’ll bet all I have to the inside of a doughnut that he didn’t give it to her. I know Ahmad the Jackal too well.”

"Sure thing, Terry. Guess we'd better make the jane open up."

When she was questioned about the trinket she gave the obvious reply. She admitted that Ahmad the Jackal had visited her and that he had given her the talisman as a present.

"Where is Ahmad the Jackal—the Moroccan soldier who gave you this?"

The girl shrugged her shoulders. Ahmad the Jackal was but one of many amongst her clientele. He had come. He had gone. How should she know where he went after he left her abode? He was nothing to her. A passing ship in a full harbour. It looked like deadlock. I stared at the women, eyeing them over in turn. There wasn't a thing to be had from those poker faces.

I had thought that Ahmad the Jackal could look after himself in any environment, however doubtful. I was wrong. He never gave that trinket away. He wouldn't give it to his own mother. I wasn't terribly concerned about the rascal. But something had gone wrong and I was damnably curious to find out just what had happened. To say he had come here for his hour of love, passed over the talisman as a present, and then continued peacefully on his way, was far too easy a conclusion. It didn't fit in with his character. He was more likely to purloin than to give.

We started the search anew, ripped the divan apart, tore down rugs and curtains, turned over every movable object in the room—while the women stood around and cursed like troopers, only more so.

"Hang on to the woman, Terry," shouted Jenkins, as the negro lunged at him with a knife.

Jenks closed with the black and the two went down in a heap. I hung on to the girl with the amulet. The other three ran from the room screaming. But I was too occupied then with what was happening at my feet. Jenkins had the negro underneath and was struggling to knock the knife out of his hand. I dodged around, dragging the girl with me, calling to my pal to hold the buck so that I could land one with the butt and lay him out. But I doubt if he could hear me above the shrieks and bellowings of the women.

I dropped down by the struggling pair, pulling the wench with me, raised the gun and struck with all the force I could muster at the woolly pate. It was all over then. The giant negro lay still. I got to my feet, still hanging on to the jane in the yellow trousers, who by this time was yapping and blaspheming while she tried to free her arm from my grip.

"Come on, buddy," snapped Jenks. "We'll search every damned corner of this dirty dump, and we take the jane with us. Maybe she will open up when she sees we mean business."

We emerged on to the balcony. There was a bunch of excited, chattering, gesticulating men and women at the entrances to the alcoves. They were shouting queries across the patio to each other. Just as we stepped out a hag of a woman in black from head to foot, with a face pale as death and dry as parchment, strode up to us, barring our progress. She was a big, bony creature with menace in her manner and a club in her fist. Apparently she was the boss of the show.

Jenkins, who was nearest her, gave her one searching look, then shot out his great paw. The black-clothed body described an arc-like movement over the balcony rail and fell with a crash in the courtyard below. That started a lot more shrieking and yelling, but we did not stop to investigate the result of her fall. We were then too busy wrecking the remainder of the alcoves around the balcony.

We rushed from one to another like a couple of lunatics, tearing down curtains and throwing the contents over the rail into the yard below. The din of screaming women and bawling men was in our ears, but we were much too busily engaged to be distracted by the racket.

The men and youths who had occupied the alcoves backed away as we approached. And through all the crazy wrecking and destruction, I never loosed my hold on the arm of the yellow-trousered wench, who, by this time, was reduced to blubbering wails and crocodiles' tears, a thoroughly wretched object in tattered finery.

We descended the stone steps to the rooms underneath, shoving the girl before us. The jabbering cluster in the yard quietened down when we appeared. Maybe they did not like the look of our guns. I guess there wasn't a man among them. Besides we kept the girl with us. She seemed to be a person of consequence about the place.

So far the trouble had not spread beyond the confines of the house. If it did we should have to shoot our way out, for we were still in the quarter of Tetuan where killings had a touch of the commonplace. We hadn't even the excuse of being drunk,

unless it was that we were liquored up with the excitement of our demented activities. If anyone had told me an hour or two before that either Jenkins or I would have acted thus in the interests of a native servant. . . . A cheap joke surely.

In spite of all the mad hazards, we contrived to rake that edifice from top to bottom. Maybe we let go to greater lengths than we had intended. But once a guy gets off the leash he takes a bit of checking. The search availed us nothing. There wasn't a sign of Ahmad the Jackal anywhere around the place.

"So what!" snapped Jenks. "Tie the bitch up to the wall. I'll make her open up. She must know where Ahmad is."

We were in one of the lower rooms of the house, alone with the girl. So far none of the natives had attempted to interfere. We were having it all our own way. When we had tied the girl up we crossed the room and turned about to face her, guns levelled. She was still protesting that she knew nothing of the whereabouts of Ahmad the Jackal. She started squealing. I had the horrible feeling that she was speaking the truth.

Jenkins was staring at her, his expressionless face hard as flint, save for that curiously sardonic twist to his mouth. I was ready to give up the whole rotten business and call it an unfortunate day. He wouldn't hear of giving up. He'd got it in his nut that this girl was fooling us. I couldn't see how it would help if we riddled her with lead.

"All you gotta do, Terry, is to stand by and watch that door. If she won't open up . . . I'll drill a

line of holes in the wall all round her. Then maybe she will."

I knew Jenkins for a crack shot, but even so, I wasn't exactly happy about that line of holes. Nor was I troubling about what would happen to us if the authorities learned of this little escapade. We belonged to the ruling militia. We were all the authority that mattered around these parts. The folks outside, however, were in different case. They might take it into their heads to rush us at any moment.

Jenkins took aim, fired. The plaster peeled away from the wall within two inches of her face. She screamed. The beady black eyes bulged, if such tiny beads could be said to bulge. The shot was so close that she must have felt the heat as it snipped by her soft cheek.

I guess I'm not very good at this suspense business. Whereas Jenks is all for it. He's a devil at that game. By the time he had circled her shaking head I was in a cold sweat. Before each shot he repeated his query, warning her that one of his plugs might not be wide enough. He couldn't be absolutely certain of the line he was drilling, especially when it came to running down neck and shoulder. Each time she told him where he could go. And when a girl does that in Arabic, there isn't any doubt about her meaning.

I was only afraid Jenks would lose patience and plug a little too close. I couldn't understand his feelings about Ahmad all of a sudden. I guess I'd no idea he thought more about the rascal than I. I'm the sort that likes to shoot and have done with

it, but Jenks prided himself on his knowledge of the Oriental mentality and believed in adopting their methods.

The girl had to be pretty slick in spreading her trousered legs, otherwise there would have been a sticky sort of accident. And all the time Jenkins was giving her the dead pan, for all the world as if this were the sort of thing he did every morning before breakfast. He was in fact terribly strung up, as I afterwards learned. It was just that he had made up his mind to put the fear of hell into the wench and so drive her to open up.

When he clipped a bit out of her leg she yelped like a dog under a tractor and began vigorously nodding her head. She was ready to tell all she knew. We sat down and listened to her. She was about all in—and so were we. That pretty bit of persuasion had taken the better part of an hour.

Her story was simple enough. Ahmad the Jackal had arrived at her alcove to find her engaged with another. He saw and he saw red. He gave one yell and charged at his rival. There seemed to have been some pretty knife-play between the two—and Ahmad the Jackal got the worst of it. I guess it takes a particular type of Spaniard to use the knife.

When it was all over the Latin got scared. He wanted to stay with the girl, but if Ahmad the Jackal were traced to that dive and found with his person slashed about, the job might be fixed on him. In which case the award for the Spaniard would be something worse than death.

Ahmad was stripped of his uniform and carried away in the dead of night to a lonely spot beyond the confines of the city, and there left to recover as best he could. We decided that the story needed some verification. The girl was made to attire herself suitably for the streets. Then we set off, one on each side of her, keeping close contact so that she had no opportunity of making a getaway. We should soon know whether she had been spinning a yarn.

It was a long trail that we made through the twisting, winding alleys of Tetuan, up one dim passage and down another—and they looked alike to me. We kept the girl going at top speed and nobody said a word. She just nodded direction at each turning. It did occur to me that it would be the easiest thing in the world for her to lead us into a trap, so I shoved my gun into her waist and kept it there.

Passers-by stared at us queerly as we sped along at that hell-bent pace. I guess we made a strange trio at that. We came at last to more open thoroughfares. The moon was at full then and the white houses had turned to silver. This city of Spanish Berbers can be really beautiful, I thought.

We mounted a winding street that lead towards the Kasba, up beyond it to the old city walls—to the Mohammedan Cemetery in fact! We pulled up suddenly. What was the meaning of this useless trek? We didn't wish to inspect a newly-made grave. The girl had given us to understand that he still lived. The girl protested vehemently. He had been placed within the cemetery walls, but only

so that he would be so scared when he recovered that he would never again seek her out. It was entirely the Spaniard's idea. He was insanely jealous of Ahmad, but apparently too weak in the stomach to risk putting the Moroccan soldier in a place from which he could never return.

I confess I don't like cemeteries. I like them less in the light of a full moon. Mohammedan graves are built over, beehive fashion, with a little opening in the front that faces towards Mecca, and in many of these openings candles are placed and lighted at dusk. But there are many old and crumbling graves where no candles ever burn.

It was in the opening of one of these that we found Ahmad. He was certainly alive—very much so. He had made his way right into the tomb. There he was, squat on his naked haunches, trying to piece some bits of cloth together. His body was covered with cuts and scars on which the blood had dried. Otherwise he had recovered pretty well.

When he saw the jane he broke into a towering rage, leapt upon her and started to claw. It was the weirdest scene—that nude, brown figure scrabbling at the girl enveloped in black habara, Moslem tombs for background. We dragged him off with an effort. He had spied the talisman around her neck and that had made him see red again.

I took the trinket from the wench and handed it to him. The pretty bauble certainly had its effects. He sobered instantly. Then he told his story. It substantiated most of what the girl had said.

Ahmad the Jackal awoke to find himself in a tomb, stripped of every inch of clothing. He had

rested there all day, not daring to move out in that state. Dusk was well advanced when a woman came to a nearby grave to light candles. He had pounced from his tomb in all his nakedness upon the terrified woman, who thought him a visitor from another world, and had torn clothing from her back before he let go.

It was those bits of clothing he was endeavouring to piece together when we came upon him—so that he might cover his person before attempting to return to barracks!

“But, by Allah, señor, would I be in this state if that spawn of the devil had not stolen my talisman?”

I wondered.

CHAPTER X

VALLEY OF DEATH

It was a complicated and an unusual sort of war which followed the revolt of the military authorities in Morocco. The ordinary campaigner, who was in the game merely for the fun of it—and could therefore hold the unbiased view—never knew where his next front would be.

It might be down the dirty little back streets of some age-old Arab city. It was just as likely to be in the open country, facing not the loyalist force which attempted to resist the establishment of a new regime, but some clan of hostile natives ever ready to get at close quarters with those whom they felt were their natural enemies.

There were natives of Morocco who fought on the side of General Franco, the Generalissimo of the nationalist force. It is now known that there were 20,000 Foreign Légionnaires and 35,000 Moors in the Nationalist Army which swept through Morocco and Spain, and the Moors included several hundreds of Riffian sharp-shooters.

In Morocco a number of Moorish Arabs also fought among the scattered bodies of the loyalists. There were, again, Riffian, Berber and Moorish Arabs who fought against both nationalist and loyalist forces, who would in fact fight any force which they considered alien to their country.

There never was such a rag-tag campaign. It was an Irish scrap in which anybody could join. Never in military history were there such wonderful opportunities for the free-lance soldier. If it were rough-housing he looked for, he had all and more than he wished. Pay was practically non-existent, but there were ample opportunities for making up that deficiency.

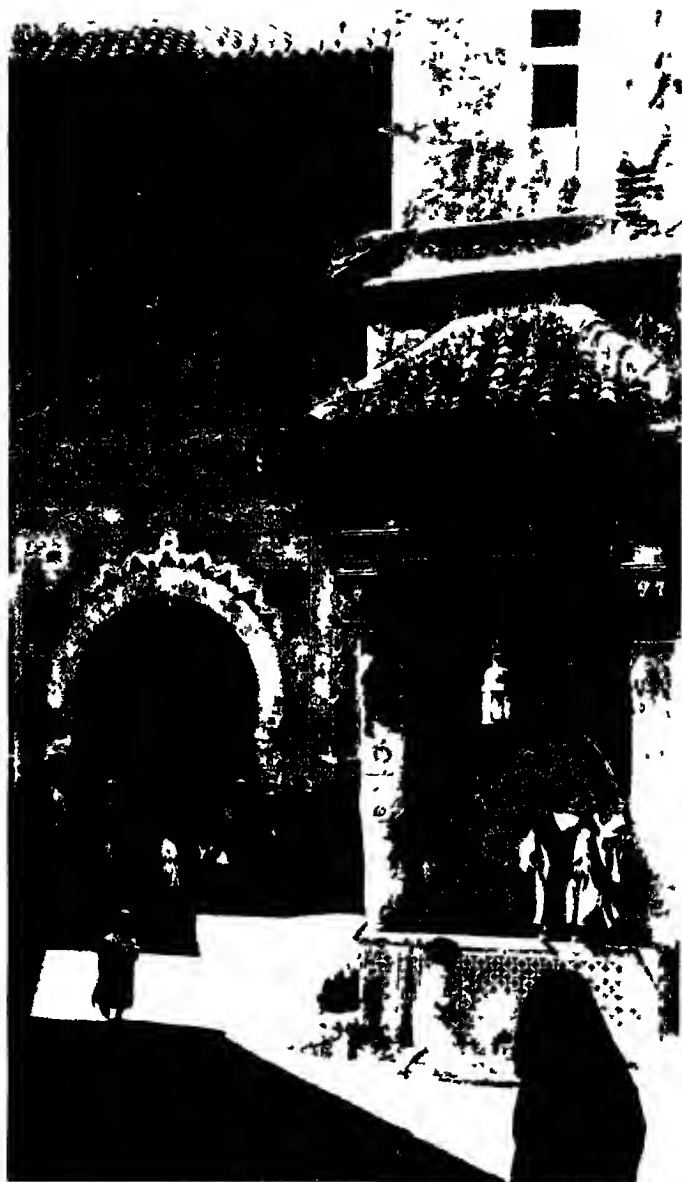
So that we took every sort of engagement in our stride. From the back alley skirmishes of Tetuan we went, on the road to Melilla, into as nice a bit of open-country warfare as one could wish.

We had progressed over undulating green country for two or three days when one of our scouts turned back and brought the news of a band of some sixty mounted Berbers, heavily armed and obviously searching for trouble.

Fernando the Great laid a trap for them. We did not know then that it was a trap. We thought it merely contempt for the Berbers. At dusk that day the squadron was halted in the bowl of a wide valley. Knowing of the presence of the hostile Berbers in the neighbourhood, it seemed at first blush to be a crazy place to pitch camp, for we were almost surrounded by hills down which the native horsemen could swoop with easy and distinct advantage.

I guessed of course that there must be something behind the choice of such ground. It looked to me like a trap from which we'd have the biggest difficulty in breaking out.

"I guess he knows what he's doing," opined Jenkins, "but it isn't the sort of place I'd have chosen.



ENTRANCE TO A "FONDAK"

Places where travellers may lodge and merchants transact business
to be found in every Moroccan town

[Face page 190

Those Berber boys will be down on us like a ton of bricks as soon as we've settled in."

There was, however, little chance of our settling in. Scouts were posted to keep watch on the crests of the higher ground all about us. Runners brought news that the bandits were resting in the cleft of a hill some few miles back, but were clearly making preparations for a descent upon us when darkness came. We were tickled to death by this game of hide-and-seek.

Captain Fernando revealed something of his plan. He had the squadron get to work to pitch camp, or something that would resemble a camp pitched for the night. A crude wall of boulders, with loopholes and gun-nests, was hurriedly thrown up. Enough men were posted behind the wall to give the appearance of a guard. Within the bowl one or two tents were pitched and a few of the pack-mules tethered.

Our experiences of the mounted Berbers led us to expect a wild and bloodthirsty charge upon the camp when all had settled down for the night. That was invariably their method. They would creep up to within a short distance of a camp, under cover of darkness, then make a galloping dash upon it with bloodcurdling yells and a withering hail of fire.

So we prepared a camp for them to charge down upon, with only a skeleton guard to make a pretence of answering their fire and to lead them into the trap. Then the body of the squadron was posted in sections in the patches of scrub-screens about the hillsides, ready to turn the tables upon the charging bandits at the sound of a given signal.

I found myself in a patch of wood overlooking the entrance to the bowl with a detachment of forty men. From our point of vantage we could shatter every living thing that entered the gully.

The night was deceptive with shadows. A fitful moon, partially obscured by drifting clouds, rendered more perplexing the dim and indistinct outline of the camp down in the bowl. In short, the conditions were ideal.

We lay in the scrub and waited for the signal. Across the valley, on the rising ground, were other sections of the squadron, also waiting. Not a sound broke the stillness. I confess I was thrilled to the bone. It all looked foolproof to me. We knew so well the methods of these Berber horsemen.

They would creep up to the mouth of the valley, within a few hundred yards of their objective, then charge like a lot of maniacs down upon the camp that had been set for them. But we should not be in the camp. We should be on their backs before they knew what was happening!

I cannot hope to convey the sort of excitement which sweeps over a fellow at times like that. It seems to surge over one in waves. I guess it is just that kind of stealthy stalk which makes life worth while for the hardened campaigner. Maybe it is just what he means when he refers to the fun of the game. At any rate, I cannot think of any more fascinating and stimulating situation than this laying of strategic traps in which to lure the enemy, particularly when the other fellow is acting as if he had a surprise attack all in his favour.

The memory of such a scene is strong and vivid,

and the picture of the entrance to the gulley, with its broken road leading to the bowl, is before me now. It seemed that I stared at that shadowy entrance for many hours—though it could not have been for more than three. And during all that time hardly a sound broke the eerie stillness.

I could feel the feverish excitement running through the men crouched around me. It was for this that they had been trained so strenuously. This sort of thing gave them time to savour a situation, to anticipate. And it promised the kind of reward for which they could sit motionless for hour after hour.

Ahmad the Jackal was by my side. He would allow no other to usurp his place. Sometimes he would turn his head slowly, his black eyes would peer into mine, shining with that strange, lustful expectation so peculiar to his breed, while the ugly jowl, that had been slashed and scarred like a ploughed field, would twist into a fiendish grin.

He'd make a loathsome enemy, I thought. I have never in my life seen such an ugly pan. It was bad enough before our sojourn in Tetuan. It was a thousand times worse after that knife-play which had brought about the loss of his beloved talisman.

I felt his touch on my hand. I peered down and saw the creeping form at the valley mouth. At first I thought the man was alone. A whole minute must have passed before the others hove into view. But what was all this? Something had gone wrong. We expected to see the bandits approach on foot and leading their horses. But there were no horses with these men. Moreover, there was nothing like sixty of them. There were less than a score.

I gazed down at their antics with a feeling of uneasiness. They crept into the valley. I counted sixteen. They separated—clearly according to some pre-arranged plan—progressed within about five hundred yards of the bowl in which we had set the dummy camp. Their movements were soundless.

Then they set to work in little groups. I stared down in amazement. There was no sign of their compatriots nor of the mounts with which they were to make the charge. It soon became clear that these fellows had no intention of making a charge.

Each little group was engaged collecting stones and boulders. They were building breastworks in different parts of the valley and with astonishing soundlessness. They carried the boulders and lowered them into position, first resting them on their hands and then gently easing them into place. In this noiseless fashion they built up half a dozen small but efficient sniping posts opposite our camp and with hardly more than a soft scraping sound occasionally.

They did it all under the amazed eyes of a squadron of Moroccan cavalry crouched about the hillsides. The move was so unlike the usual procedure of these bandits and so altogether unexpected that we could do nothing but remain put and watch. Certainly any move on our part now would be fatal.

We had expected them to make one of their wild charges. In our little stratagem we had not reckoned on anything like this! If somebody started shooting now it would upset the whole thing. Instead of the anticipated wild gallop they were calmly and very quietly erecting sniping posts.

Ahmad the Jackal shoved his face nearer mine,

brows lifted and puckered in a too-obvious query. I shrugged my shoulders. This was too much for me. It began to look as if the scheme would "gang aft agley." We could only watch and wait. Those fellows were completing their little breastworks with the most scrupulous care, every boulder lifted and caressed into position, as it were.

What did all this portend? They surely did not hope to start a siege with a few sniping posts? Yet they must have been under the impression that the whole of our squadron was at rest in that bowl, must have believed that they worked unseen.

What of the remainder of the band—and their mounts? Clearly these wallahs were preparing some sort of trap. If so, had our own scouts anything to do with it? I guess I did some swift thinking just then. Yet I could not see how our scouts and runners could have any part in this. . . .

A crash of rifle-fire broke in on my thoughts, echoing and re-echoing down the valley. It startled one in its sudden shattering of the deep silence. The mystery men had taken up their positions behind the breastworks they had built and were now firing in rapid volleys, peppering at the loopholes in the wall we had thrown up around the camp.

They may have been a mere handful, but they assuredly meant business. For several agonising minutes there was no answering fire. Would those men we had posted in the camp remain silent, waiting for the signal? I wanted to yell at them to open out with all they had. If these snipers got no answering fire they might grow suspicious, rush on the camp to investigate, and discover the trap.

Then I heaved with relief. The boys behind our own barricades began firing at the snipers. In a few minutes there was a regular little drama of battle going on down there between the skeleton guard and the group of snipers. But what was it all about?

Then it came over me in a flash. I could have thrown mud at myself for being so stupid. I can only think that the unexpected turn of events had temporarily dulled my wits. What was happening was as clear as daylight.

These Berber wallahs had changed their tactics to some tune. They were taking lessons out of the book of the infidels. They still believed the squadron was camped within that bowl. They had sent this little party of snipers to deceive us, to draw us out of the shelter of that barricade around the bowl, and having got us scattered about the valley in an effort to round up the troublesome snipers, the mounted body would then pounce upon us and play merry hell with the scattered units.

They were banking on the element of surprise. The manœuvre was so unlike the usual antics of these wild folks that it became patent there were Europeans in the party. The reckless Berbers were being taught westernised military tactics by somebody! I discovered later that pretty much the same kind of reasoning had been in the minds of Captain Fernando and friend Jenkins.

There would be no signal from the Captain until the mounted outlaws hove in sight. We must just sit tight and play the part of spectators while this phony show went on under our eyes.

There was greater need now for a watchful eye upon the mouth of the gulley. It was so easy to have one's attention distracted by the play of firearms around the bowl. Anything might happen at any moment.

I am not a good spectator. I guess most of us itched at the sound of the rapid musketry fire down there. Fingers played about trigger guards. It was not a battle between guards and snipers any more. The crackle of fire resounding cerily down the valley told of their deadly earnestness. If the expected charge did not materialise very soon the parties around that bowl would be at each other's throats.

Crouching there, listening to the ferocious and rapid ping of a handful of rifles, keeping my eyes fixed on the valley mouth, waiting, waiting for the next move in this game of trapping the trappers, I felt a terrible expectancy within me. Nerves were tense, as they used to be in the trenches when zero-hour approached. I was all keyed up and wished to heaven those mounted maniacs would roll up.

Then, out of the blue, as it seemed, they came to life at the mouth of the gulley, dashing forward with a great clattering of hoofs and fierce yells, guns firing from snap as they poured in. The night was suddenly hideous with the bawling racket and the crash of arms but above it all there came the piercing shriek of a whistle.

I was with the machine-gun section and simultaneously with the sound of that signal I loosed off, smack among them, for they were all nicely bunched. We had them just where we wanted them. The spraying of our automatic guns and the unexpected hail of shot

from the hillsides brought them up on their heels. Mounts reared with forelegs grotesquely pawing the air. The riders cursed and blasphemed in a raucous roar of surprise that was truly comic—for us safely ensconced in the galleries.

Horses and men fell forward on their heads, riddled with bullets. In a few moments that splendid body of mounted Berbers which had charged so recklessly and magnificently into the valley had become a confused mass, animals stumbling and teetering around in the confined space, riders thrown or hastily dismounting, beasts and men alike rushing about in vain efforts to seek cover from the shower of hot lead which was being poured down upon them.

Never have I seen such a frightful scramble. Their total unawareness of the trap had bottled them up completely. Some of them attempted to rush up the slopes with the crazy notion of silencing our guns. They were met by withering fire that sent them tumbling down again, dead and wounded careering together in a terrible, slithering roll over the broken descent, and coming to rest among the stampeding horses.

The screams of wounded animals and the yells of infuriated men, the chattering of machine guns and the snapping of musketry made a deafening uproar in the confines of that gulley. Some of the Berbers had crowded into the snipers' nests, others lay flat behind their dead mounts. Thus they fought on, these gallant defenders of faith and a country.

Cuddled into that automatic gun, I never felt so cool in my life. Slaughter then was unmerciful. I swung the mechanism, taking a bead wherever I saw

movement, working as mechanically as the chattering piece under my hands, while death poured out of her snout in a fiery cascade.

Ahmad the Jackal was at my side, feeding the belts, a grin cracking his ugly pan from ear to ear, his jaw tackle working in furious unison with the gun—as if he would induce it to rattle at greater speed by his crazy yapping. Maybe we were both a bit over the border just then. Wholesale slaughter gets at a man's vitals, turns his head into a bag of blood and makes him see only red.

Nothing could withstand that murderous fire. Dead and wounded were lying around the floor of the gulley. Some of the animals with the natural instinct for self-preservation galloped with scarifying neighings and whinnies towards the mouth of the valley. Some fell even as they sighted the freedom of the open country. Others broke through and were lost in the night.

But their owners, or the few still left to answer our fire, remained in the valley of death. They would never run away from the guns of the infidels, however fierce they might be. It was a happy passage, to go while fighting the Christian devils. Shots were still pouring out of those breastworks, Berber rifles still barked in a score of places up and down the gulley, from behind boulders and bush screens.

I swung the gun, honed a shower of flints from the stone nests, sprayed the hot lead for minutes on end before I could silence one armoured breastwork. Then a switch over to another nest, beating the spattering lead against the boulders until the shelter caved in on the dead and dying occupants.

One great giant of a fellow suddenly leapt to his feet and dashed up the slope towards our position. A score of rifles barked at him as he sprang forward, bullets riddling his flying cloak and missing him by inches. I stared at him for several seconds before swinging the gun in his direction. He seemed to bear a charmed life. It was as if mere rifle shot could not touch him. He was magnificent in his action and his fury, defying the whole crowd of us to do our damndest.

I guess he'd made up his mind to get at just one of the infidels' quick-firing guns before he made the journey to Allah. To me he seemed immense, towering, heroic, a leaping, bounding figure, a colossus of wrath spawned out of the shambles to mock at my puny efforts.

I loosed off at him, smack at his midriff, but still he came on! His violent, raucous bawling rose above the tumult of shot that seemed spread all around him. He was like a god in his defiance. I worked more feverishly on that lone, leaping figure than I had done on any of the other targets. For a brief space the notion teased my mind that here was something we could not kill!

Then he dropped, within fifty yards of the gun, a hoarse cry choked in mid-utterance. We discovered later the reason for his extraordinary immunity from the bullets that were showered upon him. He was armoured from head to foot with steel plates—a Crusader in the guise of a Berber. In the end he took it in his wide open mouth. The picture of that bounding gargantua will remain with me for all time.

The remaining few fought on. There was no way out, even had it occurred to any of them to seek one, for we commanded the full circle of that battle-scarred gully. The flash of their guns was the only indication of their positions. By that time they had been able to cover themselves in the broken bed down there. They would carry on to the last man.

It took hours to root out those remnants and silence them. Our boys were still firing from behind the barricades, but the shooting there had thinned and we guessed a number of them had been accounted for. These Berbers are among the world's toughest fighters—tough because they never give in. One by one they were picked off. Their fire was dying. It came up to us less vigorously, intermittently.

Dawn came. There was one Berber left and his rifle was busy. As the light broke over the valley a hail of bullets was showered down upon that lone fighter from all sides. And suddenly he too had died.

Silence then, as if we knew not what to do next. A great white light rent the heavens. A new day was born. It began with a blaze of colour. The green hills were tipped with scarlet. The valley was misty with crimson and gold. A sky of brilliant colours lit up the dreadful scene of that gully bed.

Dead men and dead mounts. Crumpled, hideous shapes everywhere. I felt incredibly weary. I wished then, for the first time, that I could get right away from all the heat and muck and slaughter of this revolting Morocco. All around us the hand of Nature painted in breath-taking colours. Below us, down in that valley, lay sprawled in death the grisly remains of sixty men, the even more dreadful forms of

once-fine horses, the ghastly evidences of man's insane itch for destruction.

We took our breakfast on the heights, where the soft morning breeze played gently, sweetened the air, for we had no wish to flavour the matinal meal with the stench of rotting dead.

From where I sat I saw the heavy figure of Fernando the Great descending the opposite slope. His dress rarely altered. He wore heavy boots, leggings, breeches, and that coarse shirt wide open at the neck, revealing the sweat glistening on the massive hairy chest. The monocle stuck in his thick jowl flashed as it caught the rays of the sun.

Three hundred pairs of eyes, admiring eyes, gazed at him as he descended into the gulley alone. He stepped heavily, but with every faculty alert nevertheless, a squat, short-barrelled Mauser in one hand, meat in the other.

He dropped on to the broken roadway and started to make an inspection of the handiwork of his beloved squadron. Wherever he found man or mount that still breathed his gun barked. The single shots echoed strangely on the morning air. We had neither the time nor the humanity for the wounded or the dying. We were not taking any prisoners.

It was then that I saw a wounded Berber working himself slowly to his knees, bringing up his long native rifle, struggling to take aim. . . . A score of us yelled at once. Fernando's head shot up. He side-stepped as the native's rifle spat, took aim with his Mauser, fired with perfect sang-froid, as if he were out shooting game. The Berber clutched at his abdomen frantically for a few seconds, doubled up

like a dog in pain, rolled over in the dirt and lay still. Captain Fernando continued his stroll along the valley, stepping over corpse and carcase with care, snapping his gun into position at intervals.

What was he, I wondered. A species of the genus male whom no amount of killing could tire. I had no doubt at all that from the lofty eminence of his grandee ancestry he looked down upon these ignorant Berbers as so much carrion, a hindrance and an encumbrance in the work of spreading Spanish culture over this fair land of Morocco.

He had decided we should not continue the journey towards Melilla until late afternoon. We were at liberty to rest until then. There was the lovely view over the green hilltops to the distant variegated plains. One could feast one's eyes upon that. The alternative was the shambles down there.

I was dozing peacefully when I heard my name bawled to high heaven. It was the Captain's voice. The voice was like the man, big, deep-chested.

I started down the slope. Jenkins was already there, standing by Fernando with half a dozen of the Moors. When I reached the little group I saw they had one of the Berbers sitting up and very much alive.

The Captain explained. The fellow was not a Berber at all. He was merely dressed as one. He was wounded in the shoulder, but not seriously enough to prevent him from explaining his presence there. He was certainly in a bad way. He had been shielding himself from further disaster by playing dead under a couple of corpses.

It was an astonishing story he told. To Captain Fernando he was a distinct find. He it was who had

been responsible for the change of tactics on the part of this band of outlaws when they prepared to make their attack upon us.

He claimed to be the "lost" General Silvestre who was captured, together with hundreds of Spanish troops, by the Riffian and Berber tribesmen during the Spanish-Moroccan war of fifteen years before.

As most people know, there have been reports for years about these troops being kept in slavery by the mountain tribes. Many of them must have died in consequence of the brutal treatment and unendurable tortures. But according to this Spaniard in Berber clothes great numbers were still in existence.

He asserted that many were found useful in training the native youth, some were given land to farm, allowed to settle down and marry Arab women. But all were forced to embrace the Moslem faith.

I stared at the grey-haired old-timer as he told his tale. His black eyes shone and he gesticulated excitedly. He was protesting with all his Latin vehemence and froth that he really was General Silvestre. He pointed with each finger in turn as he drew imaginary sketches on the air, illustrating his long and ill-fated days under the heel of his Berber masters.

He explained that when this military revolt broke out in Morocco the Berbers and the Riffs saw in it a grand opportunity once again to make war on the Spanish Christians. But they lacked the leadership of an Abd-el-Krim, and there was no unity amongst them. They were content, it appeared, to indulge in their futile and sporadic raidings on isolated detachments of troops.

"How is it you are the only Spaniard with this band, since, as you say, there are still big numbers of them living and fighting with the Berbers and the Riffs?"

The old man snorted.

"Do I have to answer the questions of a *Légionnaire*?"

"You have been content to obey your Berber masters!" snapped Captain Fernando, with a lift of his foot. "You will answer the sergeant."

The old Spaniard stared at me for a minute, spat his disgust.

"If you were not such fools," he said, "you would know that more than half of these men you have been fighting are Spaniards in Berber clothes. You are deceived by a mantle? By a beard? Fifteen years is a long time. For fifteen years we have lived and worked and fought with the people of the hills, married their women, produced many children, adopted their manners and customs and religion. There is no difference between a Spaniard and a Berber, a Riff and a European—except in the matter of dress. . . ."

It was now our turn to stare.

"That so-called Berber who, even while he was dying, could rise to his knees and attempt to put a bullet in your Captain's belly, was no Berber at all. He, too, was Spanish. He has lived these many years among the hill folks with his Berber wife and his family. You think that you have finished with this tribe of Berbers. You have killed them all and there is an end. But it is not so. These men, Berber or Spanish, have left behind them in the

mountains their womenfolk and their sons. They will not forget. I, General Silvestre, was once as arrogant and stupid as you are now. I looked upon these people of the hills as rascals and vagabonds of no account. I was wrong. They love their country. They never forget."

There was much more in the same strain. It was clear that the old-timer had grown to be part of the life and customs of the natives, but through it all he reiterated that he was none other than the long lost General Silvestre.

It was the Captain's idea that he should be taken prisoner and conveyed to Melilla. His knowledge of the Berbers ought to be extraordinarily useful to the military authorities. After fifteen years among those people he should be a veritable mine of information—whether he were General Silvestre or not.

Unfortunately it did not pan out that way. We had not been on the march more than a couple of hours when there was a cry of alarm from the Moorish guards who had charge of the "General." He had been wounded for the last time, had seen his last campaign. He passed out there and then, among the green hills he had learned to love. He went, I guess, in the way he would have wished.

We always referred to him as General Silvestre, friend Jenkins and I. Whether he actually was the famous general we never knew. To us he was the central figure of an unforgettable episode in a strange campaign.

CHAPTER XI

ADUSHA

WE drew very much nearer to the heart of things when we reached Melilla. The boys were then looking towards Spain where, according to our information, the Generalissimo's army was sweeping everything before it. But I was not one of those looking across the blue with any longing to be in at the thick of it in Spain. By that time I had had more than enough of this revolt. This was not campaigning as I understood it.

Melilla proved the limit for me. I thought I had seen some dastardly acts perpetrated in the name of Revolt during our engagements in Morocco. I had not begun to see things. After three months of the most merciless slaughter throughout Morocco and Spain, they were still building up the Nationalist forces in Melilla, for it was in this North African coast town where all the dirty work was organised.

The worst possible type of press gang was at work. The place reeked with espionage and counter-espionage. It was a paradise for the free-lance, but more especially for the callous freebooter. The more brutal the man, the better the pickings in Melilla.

Melilla was then in an indescribable state of chaos. There was murder every day and all day. One half the populace was crazy and the other half cowed. Sympathisers of both factions had obtained ample

supplies—from heaven knows where!—to back their fancies.

The place was full of Italians and Germans. Italian N.C.O.s with Ethiopian fighting experiences were as common as Moors. The Italians and the Germans, to say little of the Portuguese, worked openly for the Nationalist Cause. Where were the Russian agents? They were not to be found in the public places of Melilla. Yet there seemed no lack of funds for the Loyalist Cause as well.

Between them, these supporters of Nationalists and Loyalists, they played merry hell with the populace of Melilla. The world at large should rid itself of the notion that the Spanish Revolt of 1936 was a war between two opposing factions of Spain. It was nothing of the kind.

There was a score of nationalities among the men who composed the Spanish Foreign Legion. Great numbers of them had no interest in Spain as a nation. They were there for the fun of the fight and nothing more. What did it matter to them who was right or who wrong in this crazy revolt?

Why should the thousands of Moors and Riffians be expected to care whether they fought for the right in Spain and Morocco? They could not know right from wrong. (Who did, anyway?) They fought in the cause of Spaniards and against Spaniards because they liked fighting, because they were paid mercenaries, because they dared not disobey their superior officers, because they were engaged for the job by the nobles of Spain.

The nobles of France engaged Swedish and German mercenaries to fight for their Cause—the cause that

brought about the French Revolution. The mercenaries revolted.

The Moors revolted in Melilla too. In spite of every bestial and bloodthirsty reprisal, the revolts among them continued. Firing squads marched out every day, but they did not stop the revolts among the natives of Morocco. They revolted because they did not get enough to eat, because they could not get their pay, because a comrade had been brutally flogged to death.

But no one ever suggested that the Moroccans revolted because they were in sympathy with the Loyalists. That would have been too funny. In that atmosphere, such a suggestion would have brought forth loud horse laughs. Why should these Moroccans, who loved their own land and whose fathers fought and died in trying to save their land, have any sympathy with those Spaniards holding similar simple ideals?

Garrisons fringe the seaport town of Melilla. At one period there was no holding down these native troops. One regiment after another revolted. At this time the world believed that all was over in Morocco. The Press of the world was concentrated upon the warring factions in Spain. Morocco as a centre of interesting bloody revolt had dropped out of the limelight.

Yet the Generalissimo's army in Spain included massed thousands of Moors. These massed ranks were continually being reinforced. Moors and Riffs were despatched from Melilla in thousands, by force, by the press gangs, and the press gangs were composed largely of Italians, Germans and Portuguese. So much

for the component parts of the opposing forces in this historic Spanish revolt.

I had not been in Melilla many hours before I came up against this epidemic of revolts. There is nothing so contagious as a sanguinary revolt. A regiment of Moors had revolted. Jenks and I went along next morning to see the fun. The regiment had been subdued by a regiment of Légionnaires. The Moors were marched out on parade. A bunch of officers and non-commissioned officers went round the ranks, picking out men, about one out of every eight or nine, and these luckless ones were lined up.

The firing squad marched up. This was by way of being a permanent sort of firing squad. It composed about forty selected men. They were big, brawny, brutal-looking fellows. They were neither Spaniards nor natives of Morocco. They were muscular giants of European extraction with a sprinkling of ebony for make-weight. Obviously they had been selected with the intention of putting the fear of hell into the native troops. They certainly put the wind up my sails. Firing squad was merely a name for this bunch of sadists.

The victims stood about in straggling groups. There was no need to give them a military dress. Not worth the trouble apparently. They would not be with us long, anyway.

The great square was entirely surrounded by troops with drawn bayonets. No chance for any of these miserable devils to make a getaway. Not a dog's chance.

A bugle sounded. An officer stepped forth. Suddenly there was silence. The officer could be heard

in every corner of the square as he read out the military awards for mutineers. He gabbled at a terrific rate. It was impossible for even a good student of Spanish to follow him. It did not matter. The poor devils were doomed.

The firing squad walked around them in a sort of semi-circle. The order was given. Rifles barked. Many of the mutineers crumpled up, but some were still standing, looking stupidly at the men with the guns who had missed them.

The firing squad continued to fire. They took pot-shots at anything in that straggling group that appeared to be alive. Never in my life have I seen anything so cold-blooded. Hundreds of troops stood around with drawn bayonets. I guess it was all a matter of entertainment. They were only "ignorant natives," anyway.

On the evening of that same day another revolt broke out. It started among a section of the famous Banderia, an Arab battalion. Bedlam was let loose. Darkness had descended when we arrived on the scene and the affray was in full swing. There was a terrific hullabaloo. Arab troops were racing across the square, yelling their defiance, rifles snapping, knives hurtling through the air.

They had run amok and were thoroughly out of hand—until the Nationalist Volunteers and a detachment of the Legion rolled up. Then there was a pitched battle. Jenks and I were merely spectators of the extraordinary scene, for our Moroccan cavalry were kept out of this kind of trouble. Perhaps they would have revolted too rather than fire on their compatriots.

There was a huge crowd of men and women around the garrison, all out to watch the fun. It was a strange mob, most of it vociferous, excited, lustful, always ready to lick its chops when blood was being spilled. Some of it, however, was sullen, seething with hatred for the Spanish oppressors.

The women were to the fore as usual, black-skirted she-devils, with foam-smeared, lascivious mouths, dark eyes afire, shrieking and cheering. Their cries could be heard above the crackle and splutter of the musketry. They were promising rewards to their favourites among the fighters, promising with giggling abandon the ambiguous pleasures of their garlic-scented kisses, offering more intimate possessions. . . . Ferocious, blatant, clamorous creatures with hardly anything feminine in their make-up.

While only a few yards in front of them, men were bashing at each other's heads, a voice was bellowing at the mutineers to surrender, lead spat back and forth, troops were dancing and leaping about in the confined space of the square with bayonets drawn, some dropping to their knees to fire, others slumping to the ground to be trampled and trodden over in that frightful scrimmage.

And all the time men and women laughed and cheered, for all the world as if this were some special performance staged to amuse and excite them. Jenks and I were shoved and jostled by men and women who in their passionate lust for sensation had ceased to be human. They were thrusting and clawing like a lot of lunatics, and it seemed at one time as if the yapping mob must become inextricably mixed up with the troops and mutineers.

Then a mounted squadron came up at the gallop. The mob scattered in all directions, tumbling over each other, knocking one another down in their wild efforts to escape the flying hoofs, the raucous yells of men mingling with the screams of terrified women and children, for the mounted troops rode mercilessly into the heart of the struggling, joggling, agitated throng.

I have a very vivid recollection of a black-eyed wench turning upon me with scarifying, hysterical shrieks, stamping and clutching at my person as if she would climb to safety over my dead body. Wild, intimidating eyes and a sickening stench of garlic remain engraved in the memory of that crazy scramble.

"Of all the insane bitches," gasped Jenks, heaving and cleaving through the mob.

I recall Melilla as a place of street fights, riots, revolts, jostling, angry crowds, hot, passionate men, infuriated women, cold-blooded killings, appalling chaos.

Native troops were supplied with vouchers to exchange for goods from the tradespeople—mainly Spanish, Portuguese and Arabian—but the tradespeople would not accept the vouchers.

That started another rough-house. The Arab soldiers gathered outside the shops. Their rumbling rage at being deprived of the necessities of life could be heard a mile away. It was followed by an ugly roar, a mad charge, and then the wrecking and looting of the shops, in which the hungry populace joined whole-heartedly.

The result—more executions. Every morning there

was a big batch of men and women to be shot. Every morning the crack firing squad could be seen marching through the Avenue de Libertad on their way to the grim tasks awaiting them at the execution grounds.

To see them marching along, jaunty of step, every pan cracked in a leering grin, one could never have guessed that these men were going out to the grisly job of putting to death the mutineers, the political offenders—many of them brought to Melilla from the interior for execution—the looters and marauders of both sexes, the thugs, the desperadoes of all kinds, as well as the perfectly innocent citizens who had unwittingly housed or in some way assisted other malefactors of the new regime.

This daily march of the death squad was by way of being a "demonstration," a grim warning to other would-be enemies of the new government. It was headed by a band. The streets through which the executioners passed were lined with crowds, mostly cheering, but some jeering, furtively booing—as if their hatred of these swaggering usurpers could not be restrained.

Men, women and children fell in behind the death squad, marched and danced in its wake all the way to the execution grounds.

There the crowd would gather and watch while the wretched victims, black, brown and white, of both sexes and all ages, were brought up and shot. To stand in that crowd and listen to the comments of the people while the executions went on apace made one's spine creep. Boys and girls could tarry and stare at that unedifying spectacle, discuss the

accuracy or otherwise of the shots, the swift or slow slithering to earth of the bodies, and with the utmost nonchalance.

Melilla was the headquarters of Spanish military power in Morocco. Nearly every night the death 'planes would arrive from the interior with their load of condemned prisoners. There were no trials. A small committee of officers decreed who was to be executed, who was to serve a prison sentence. But the prisons were full and the death sentences made fat graveyards.

The bodies were carted to the burial grounds and laid out in rows, irrespective of colour, race or sex. Those not claimed within twenty-four hours were tumbled higgledy-piggledy into communal graves. Not many bodies were claimed in the broad light of day. To be a claimant was to be a marked man—or woman, for there were spies everywhere, even in the graveyards. Sometimes there would be raids in the burial grounds. Scores of bodies would disappear. God knows what happened to them.

Melilla was also the clearing ground for the thousands of Moorish reinforcements transported to Spain. Day and night the press gangs poured into the city with their victims, receiving payment per head for every miserable wretch they could drag into the net. Some of these gangs went far afield, roamed the countryside, scoured the hills, for this was one sure method of making real money.

Day and night these so-called troops were flown to Ceuta, another clearing ground, or direct to Spain, where they fought against one mob of Spaniards at the behest of another mob of Spaniards.

It was no uncommon sight to see Arab boys of fourteen to eighteen years being kicked and bludgeoned and beaten until they got aboard the airplanes. Many of those youths who had come under guard from the interior had never seen an airplane in their lives before. They had not the foggiest notion as to what was expected of them. They knew only that they were going to Spain to fight for their Spanish protectors, that in Spain they would be given plenty of money, an abundance of good food, and there would be white women for their amusement. And even then they had to be flogged into obedience.

What little training these youths had was given to them by Italian and German instructors. The rifles they used had seen service in Abyssinia. It seemed at times, especially when one cared to note the imprint on the cases of ammunition that poured into Melilla, that half the nations of Europe were sending supplies to both Nationalist and Loyalist forces in this crazy war of revolt.

By keeping up the supplies of war material, those nations fostered and perpetuated the bloody conflict between Spaniard and Spaniard. *At least six European nations were responsible for prolonging the ghastly business, notwithstanding the fact that they were members of the League of Nations.*

How indeed could a wrecked country like Spain be self-sufficient in this immense business of adequate supplies of war materials after two or three months of wholesale carnage and national destruction?

During my sojourn in Melilla, Franco, the Generalissimo, arrived on a flying visit from Spain. His presence in the city was the signal for a renewal of

the riots and bloodshed. Mobs, vast conglomerations of native troops, native and European civilians, gathered in the streets. These were not dispersed by baton charges of police, but by the sub-machine guns of Nationalists and the machine guns of the Legion.

Whole streets were strewn with dead and dying. The shops of both European and bazaar quarters were smashed and looted. Never in history was there such free-for-all, bloodthirsty, senseless conflicts. Terror reigned supreme. There wasn't any law and order at that time, save the law of the gun and the order of the execution committee. But what, in heaven's name, did the world at large know of these things? The Press of Europe and America was concentrated upon the war in Spain. All was quiet on the Moroccan front!

Representatives of the nations which sent supplies of men and material should have visited Melilla while I was there, during September of this year of grace 1936, ought to have seen the red stains in the streets, the wrecked and torn bodies, the activities of the death squad—for which, incidentally, they supplied arms and shot. The pictures would certainly have been more effective than all the chin-wagging of League committees.

It was worth a lot to be a spectator in Melilla in those days. These things have to be experienced in order to appreciate the true trend of European nations to-day. There is no such thing as progress. Humanity is speeding downhill at the devil's pace. We are not waiting for another Great War. It is already here. First Ethiopia, then Morocco, now Spain—to-morrow? It is a great war in which great

nations take a part. It has merely changed its form—one bloody area at a time is about all we can manage in our exhausted state.

Just the same, it is a war entirely without limits in its persecution. As for example, there was one riot of Légionnaires and native troops that threatened to spread itself over and beyond the confines of the garrison fringe. The fighting reached such dimensions that the authorities were powerless to deal with it—until they sent one of the Junkers bombers over to smash it to bits.

Bombs crashed down amongst troops and civilians, wrecking buildings, shattering windows, tearing great holes into the ground, sending the combatants skywards in little pieces, scattering the crowd in all directions. What targets for that crazy bomber!

Men and women were struck down as they ran for shelter. I watched from a roof more than a mile away, but under that blazingly clear blue sky it was all like a moving panorama of pre-movie days, with the sides of houses torn out, vehicles thrown into craters, fleeing figures picked up and tossed about, figures suddenly halted and laid flat. The screams of men, women and children, of mules and donkeys, came up to one in that morning breeze in a volume of sound that defies all attempts at description.

When it was all over, the fatigue parties were turned to clean up the mess. Shops were opened again. The thoroughfares filled up once more with the colourful, animated throngs, white, brown and black intermingling in the bazaars to discuss the effects of the latest revolt and whisper of the possibilities of the next.

Life was never so cheap.

Jenkins and I, accompanied by Ahmad the Jackal, strolled into one of the cafés on the evening of that day the bomber had played merry hell with the rioters. A bunch of the death squad walked, or, rather, swaggered into the place, and immediately took possession. They were fine muscular beasts built in the manner of men. In no time at all the girls were all over them. Astonishing how some women will fall for brute force.

They occupied a table nearby. The *habitué* of the dive gave them plenty of space not out of respect, but out of loathing and fear.

They were interesting to watch, those executioners. I would not, however, dare any attempt at reproducing their bright conversation. Enough to state that they talked of their work, of the numbers that awaited them on the morrow.

I had long ago decided that this crazy life was no game for me. Ever since the days of the World War I had thought myself something of a wandering adventurer. But this wasn't quite what I meant. Maybe I hadn't the stomach for this sort of thing. Perhaps it was just satiation. I was not alone. Friend Jenkins had pretty much the same view.

"I guess I'm just fed," he said.

As Légionnaire N.C.O.'s with the Moroccan cavalry, we should either stay put for a while in Melilla, with perchance an occasional skirmish into the interior, or be drafted to Spain. Preparations were being made, they said, for a big advance upon Madrid. In Melilla we had no means of knowing just what was happening in Spain. We depended

entirely on censored news sheets. But the fact was that neither of these prospects appealed to us.

We had talked this way before without ever coming down to brass tacks. How were we to break away? Not that it would be difficult in the midst of this chaos—providing we had an object in view, some place to go.

It was the woman Adusha who made it all clear and simple. We had watched her one or two nights in this same café. She did not avoid the company of the executioners, neither did she seek it. That was the first peculiarity about her which impressed itself upon us.

She was in the company of these bright wenches but not of it. True, she retired at intervals like the rest of them. Yet there was something different about her. Ahmad said she was a Riff. Most of the girls were Moorish Arabs, or Spanish Arabs.

Adusha had the colouring of a Riff woman. Her hair was not black but bronze. She had dark brown eyes flecked with lighter brown, big and soft like those of a gazelle. But there was nothing soft about the firm broad face, the straight full lips and the rather prominent straight nose. The beauty of her was in the texture of the sun-painted skin and the sheen of bronze hair. She had the well balanced poise of the free woman of the mountains.

It was Ahmad who drew her into our company. He had a way with him, that lad. Maybe she was just a shade curious too. Two or three nights in her company and we were good friends.

I recall one night in particular. Adusha and I had retired. It was the sudden burst of confidence, or

cool dark streets. But, strangely, I had no fear that she would do anything of the kind. And I guess that was how she felt about me. These things are largely matters of sympathy and circumstance.

In that room, high up in the building, remote, cosy, secluded, concealed against the world, everything was different. There was an atmosphere there, a warmth that breathed confidence, a fervency alien by centuries to the blind, sordid, bestial, ensanguined activities of Melilla's streets.

It was as if I had been out of range of these harsh sights and sounds for a timeless period, so deep was the impression of that strange abode. I know that I hurried through the highways and byways towards my quarters with a new sense of freedom seething within me. I had had a surfeit of blood. Now I was done with it. I was free.

But I had not gone very far when I heard footsteps behind me and a voice calling. It was the voice of Ahmad the Jackal. I swung round. He came up breathlessly. He was panting as much from excitement as from his exertions.


"Señor! Señor! The woman Adusha! They are in her room! They are asking questions of her . . .!"

"Who are asking questions?"

"The men of the firing squad. She came down to the café when you had gone. They took her back to her room. She made me understand with her eyes."

"Why should they question her?"

"But the señor knows? They must have learned something. There are so many spies . . . spies in all places."



Mechanically I had turned about, was retracing my steps.

"But you cannot go back there, señor. That would give her away."

"We must go back, Ahmad. We must see what is happening . . . without being seen. We must know what they are going to do with her."

"What can they do, señor? They cannot know?"

"They suspect. That is enough. Those dogs can do anything."

"But . . . by the beard of the Prophet, señor, they shall not take Adusha! I will not let them!"

"You? Where is Jenkins?"

"He was there. Then, without any warning, he was not there."

"Keeping out of the way, I guess. He'll be around."

"Yes, señor. He will not be far from the trouble."

How true of friend Jenks!

Just the same, I felt suddenly sick. If those fellows of the death squad suspected anything at all, they would soon concoct a story for the committee—any ridiculous fabrication would serve to secure another victim, especially a woman and one who had apparently shown some indifference towards them.

Maybe there was nothing more to it than that. They disliked her air of independence. She had not fallen for them with that worshipful adoration which they considered their due from all presentable girls. Or maybe I was just trying to console myself. This looked like being a hell of a setback to all our plans.

Of one thing I felt certain, however. They would never make her talk. I knew something of their methods. The sort of persuasion that could only have been thought of by depraved sadists. The third degree was child's play in comparison. And yet I could feel satisfied that she was not the sort to give anybody away.

Thought sped swiftly with me then. Supposing they took her along to the calabozo. I started to sweat. They must not get her into that dungeon. Once inside that hell-hole and all hope would be gone. They'd torture the guts out of her. They had done it before with other women. I had not seen it myself. The stories of those appalling atrocities had come to me from Légionnaires who had done guard duty at the calabozo. And not the toughest Légionnaire I've ever met would spin yarns of that sort if he hadn't seen with his own eyes. If the half of it were true. . . . Well, I was ready for a whole lot of rough-housing to prevent them dragging Adusha into that.

There was no sign of anything amiss when we reached the alley in which the café was situated. Though it was long past the midnight hour, men and women were still carousing. Gaily-lighted interiors threw shafts of light across the cobbled street. Sounds of ribaldry greeted us as we hurried by the open doorways. Women were plying their trade a little more boisterously now as a result of the liquor they had taken aboard. Men rolled out of the hovels hilariously drunk. It was all very ordinary and sordidly commonplace.

We slunk into the shadows across the street and

stared up at the building. They must still have been in there with Adusha. They could not have left. We should have met them as they made their way out of the quarter to go to the calabozo. The door of the patio was open, inviting all and sundry to enter the café as a preliminary to adjourning to those rooms high up around the balcony.

"They cannot have taken her, señor. Shall we go in?"

"Wait!"

Ahmad the Jackal feared no man. He had been in a thousand scrapes. But this was different. We could not afford to take any chances. We had to meet cunning with cunning. It was possible—but not very probable, I feared—that the executioners might leave the building without her. Or maybe they would descend to the café for liveners. . . . I tried to think of all manner of means of reaching her. I guess I was as impatient and excited as Ahmad. But I still realised that this thing called for cool reasoning.

What in hell was a fellow to do? In all the best stories the guy who rescues a damsel in distress would have rushed in the place, held the band up at the point of his gun while his partner dragged the girl out, and then blazed his own way out. That crazy notion certainly occurred to me. I might even have pulled it off—as far as the street. We shouldn't have made much headway after that, not with all this mob of spies and pimps and renegades around, ready to horn in on any free-for-all that would provide both sensation and profit.

Ahmad suddenly clutched my arm, let out an oath. But I had already seen. I held my breath. Two figures, a man and a woman, were slinking around the shadows of the patio. They reached the shaft of light that penetrated the curtained doorway of the café, leapt, and in breathless seconds had reached the alley.

"Jenks!"

It was just a hoarse croak, but neither he nor Adusha hesitated in their dash through the cobbled street.

"How?" I gasped, when we drew level, were pacing them.

"Keep moving, you sap! Keep moving!" growled Jenkins.

We did, looking neither to right nor left, as we slunk like scared rats through the maze of the narrow tortuous alleys of that dirty backwater of Melilla.

CHAPTER XII

BEYOND THE SPANISH PROTECTORATE

As we hurried along I became aware that we were being tagged. I said as much to Jenks. He grinned. He would.

"Okay, buddy. Let's take a looksee."

We paused to get our second wind, hugging the shadows of a building. Four hooded figures came along. I knew it! They, too, were clinging to the shadows. I thought for a breathless moment they must stumble right into us. They did not. To my amazement, they drew level with us and halted, stood staring at us through their heavy veils.

Maybe I just peered and gaped. The unexpectedness of four heavily draped women had rather taken me aback. One of them whispered something to Adusha. She murmured a reply. I stared queringly at Jenks. That wallah was still wearing a sardonic grin on his twisted mouth. Adusha jerked out a command. We moved off in a bunch.

I turned to Jenkins as we trudged on.

"What's all this mystery?"

"All right, Terry. Keep your shirt on. As soon as we get clear of this hole, I'll give you the low down."

And with that I had to be content for an hour or two. We were by no means out of the wood.

We were climbing the alleys of Melilla's backwaters with the idea of getting out of the city as speedily as possible.

It seems we had left something back there, in Adusha's abode, that must be discovered sooner or later. We hoped it would be later. Time meant everything to us just then. When it was discovered there would be hell to pay in this red city of Melilla. There would be such a hue and cry for Adusha, and for those who had plotted with her, as even this bloodthirsty area had not known before.

Whether we should ever make a getaway was on the knees of the gods. It looked extremely doubtful to me. The discovery must certainly be made sometime in the early morning. And then. . . . This city of death would be raked from end to end. We had a chance in a thousand. We had gone too far to turn back now. There was nothing else to do but go on—three fugitives from the Moroccan cavalry and five wenches also seeking escape.

I have never experienced anything like that blind rush into—for me—the unknown. I shall never forget it. I did not then know what had happened back there, could not know what we were fleeing from, nor what these four hooded, mysterious women had to do with it. But Adusha had escaped from the clutches of those men of the death squad, and that was enough to make me realise that something terribly desperate had occurred.

It would be useless my attempting to describe that wild dash through the darkened highways and byways of Melilla to the outskirts of the city. It was a complete maze to me. I could never have

found my way alone. As the streets became quieter and the lights vanished, I found myself following the others in a stumbling jogtrot through almost complete blackness, where every passage looked alike. Without the help of these women, we should never have been able to make our way out of the city by night.

We did, however. We reached the camel caravan, about which Adusha had confided to me in the seclusion of her abode, with safety. The cameleers were unprepared for our arrival. In the original plan we were not to make our dash for a couple of days. There were others involved in this breakaway—a number of Riffian youths who had been forced into military service by the press gangs.

And now—Adusha was in danger. There wasn't a minute to lose. The caravan had to get under way at once. It looked as if the youths must be left to their fate—unless some other members of this particular tribe could go to their assistance.

Our advent caused a great commotion amongst the cameleers. But when the danger of Adusha's position was explained to them, they set to work at once. By dawn our caravan was well on its way. Melilla was but a patch of colour in the distance.

It was the birth of a new day in more than one sense. I turned and looked back. The light was growing stronger, gushing up out of the violet gloom that seemed to hang like a pall over Melilla. I never looked back on anything with such extraordinary feelings of relief. I marvelled at the flash of light that came up over the eastern horizon.

It seemed to hover above the pale, distant city—then it changed, became a great flush of rose, quivering and poising over that terror-stricken city, changed again, was blood-red. . . . That is how I remember Melilla. Blood-red.

It was not until we had started our journey with the caravan, that I could induce friend Jenkins to explain what had happened when he learned that Adusha was in the hands of some of the death squad. By that time the whole prospect had taken on a much more rosy hue. We felt we had more than a sporting chance of getting right away from the bloody turmoil of the Spanish revolt in Morocco.

Our uniforms had been discarded, buried deeply so that they could not lead to our trail. We then assumed the jellabas and head-dress and other distinctive garb of the Riffian. It was not difficult for us to adopt the guise. The people of the Riff possess the colouring common to Europeans. The difference is one of dress and climate. We had been long enough in the country to have acquired that hardened and weathered appearance, and to have picked up much of the native patois.

By the time the sun was up we had left Melilla well behind and had dipped down beyond the mountain barrier that hides the city. We soon grew accustomed to our swaying mounts, for they were not unfamiliar to us. By noon we were treading a cautious path along a ridge of the scented hills and could then breathe freely.

Not that we were out of danger. We never knew what we should meet round the next corner. The nationalists, the press gangs, the patrolling native

those four mysterious women who had torn up everything to give a hand in getting Adusha out of that room. He could never have got away with that trick if it had not been for those four.

When he had learned from Ahmad the Jackal what was happening, he turned to the girl of the moment, who happened to be of the same clan as Adusha. She had shown considerable agitation at the news and had immediately acquainted the other three with the situation. Jenkins has said since that he never saw such expressions of stark horror as those women displayed. They might have been learning of the death of their beloved Adusha.

Those girls went speedily to work. It was ascertained that there were five executioners in the room with Adusha. The four friends explained their plan to Jenkins. They would take some liquor up to the men and suggest a carousal in Adusha's abode. That would not be difficult. They knew their job. They would season the drink and Jenkins could then leave the rest to them. In less than half an hour they would have those five men laid out in a row.

Jenks followed the women up to the balcony. He saw them disappear into Adusha's room with a supply of liquor, then sat in a corner to wait for the signal. In a few moments he heard sounds of merriment coming from that room and knew the women had got to work.

He had not long to wait. One of the women came out and beckoned. When he entered Adusha's abode he found the five members of the death squad sprawl-

ing all over the place. They were not exactly out for the count, but it would not be many minutes before they were all sound asleep.

One of them made a feeble attempt to rise when Jenkins appeared on the scene. The girl in his lap promptly hit him with a bottle and he lay flat. Jenks took no further notice of the doped executioners. He reached for Adusha and hastened with her down to the courtyard. That was how we joined up with him. The other women remained in the room only long enough to see the death squad properly laid out.

Any detailed description of the manner in which those women went to work upon the men at their mercy would hardly make nice reading. That must be left to the imagination. I guess they paid off a few old scores before making a hurried exit.

After all, they were working for their own clan. Boys of their clan had been shot down in cold blood by these same executioners. One scarcely anticipates forgiveness in this sanguinary game of revolt and counter-revolt—certainly not from women of the Riff country.

Knowing the death squad and its dastardly work, I say frankly I was not in the least concerned about those five members. I guess they had everything coming to them. Nor did it make a mite of difference with friend Jenks. He was tops with those four women throughout that memorable journey. Had he not helped them save their beloved Adusha? A stranger, seeing him with that quartette, might have been excused for thinking he had started a little harem of his own.

There were three youths in the caravan who had made the break from Melilla, as well as the ten cameleers, our own party and a string of fifteen camels. Altogether a regular family gathering.

Everything went smoothly enough that first day. We had made a good start. By sunset we were facing a great expanse of undulating green country, a vast carpet patterned in many colours by the dying sun. Prayers, our second meal of the day, and on again. That night the moon rose like a giant lantern, shedding a weird radiance over all that fertile land.

That night ride was a beautiful experience. Adusha and I rode at the head of the caravan, with Jenkins and his retinue tagging immediately behind. Every man and woman in the string was armed—beneath their enveloping cloaks—but to all outward appearances we were just a band of peaceful Riffian merchants.

For the most part we rode in silence. The moon-drenched green world was soundless—except for the steady, muffled thud of splay hoofs on the velvet carpet. We progressed in just that way, hour after hour, in an atmosphere of perfect serenity, at peace with the world. I wished that it could go on and on like that, swaying gently and dreaming enchantingly, with Adusha in the saddle and the picture always before me of that eerily-lit expanse.

It seemed to be enough that we were together, this strange woman and I, rocking drowsily on through the night. One tiny incident is not easily forgotten. As part of my Riffian dress, Adusha had presented me with a long chain of amber. We had been riding

for a long space in silence when she turned suddenly, lifted the chain of beads over her head, so that it encircled us both. Those curiously flecked eyes were very close to mine then.

There was something about that moonlit stretch of verdant country that reached deep down into one, filling the mind with strange thoughts, fanciful dreams engendered by the hour and the tranquility of the scene. Surely there could be no greater contrast—this nocturnal solitude and that awful blood-thirsty clamour and strife we had left behind?

There came an inexplicable heightening of the senses then, a curious elevation of the emotions to unaccustomed planes. Impossible to convey the rapture of such a scene, such a nocturnal atmosphere. I wanted to get right away from the incessant thrumming of war and bestial hatreds. I had succeeded beyond all measure.

I have spent many nights in the desert, in the vast green spaces of the East, in the hinterlands of Africa, but never experienced one so beautiful. Such a wonderful panorama inspires a man, fascinates and bewitches him. The moon's radiance spread itself over all of that mysterious night. Its light illumined every palm and bush and bank of luxuriant sward, tinged the atmosphere with an unearthly lustre, kept the senses tautly strung.

We rode as if hypnotised by the glamour of the nocturnal hours. There was no disturbing chatter from the woman who shared my saddle. She, too, was content with the hour. This spacious land was her home. I could but marvel, for she had braved

much to play her part in Melilla, to sojourn in that red city for a while so that she could help in the freeing of some of her people. . . .

We rode on the borderland of dreams. We rode where every man and woman would wish to ride sometimes—away from the world of unwanted realities into a land of enchanting make-believe. She was not a woman from the wilds of the Riff mountains, nor was I a world-wandering freebooter and erstwhile Légionnaire. We were children of the night when the spell is at its height.

The savage beauty of that landscape under the spot-light of a low-hanging moon has to be seen to be believed. It is quite incredible in its barbaric splendour. It emerges out of the violet night like something in a dream. Such extravagant illumination of an ageless land has something of terror in its appeal.

In that light the giant cactus peculiar to the country stands out, a fantastic and wildly exaggerated adornment, with its great thick leaves and its tulip-like flowers of pale gold. Every stunted palm and bush comes to mysterious life in this world of fantasy. The scene inspires awe even while it intoxicates.

It is for such experiences as this that restless men wander about the earth. This it is that makes a man yearn to be footloose, to be free from the restraints and artificialities of a stay-at-home civilisation.

And the strange, exotic creature beside me, mysterious as the night, barbaric as the landscape, alluring and sensual as the atmosphere which wrapped us

about, was herself an essential part of the whole Oriental dream.

There was a glow in her fine, strong face, in the smooth skin. The eyes, peculiarly flecked, glowed intimately close to mine, as if they had taken to themselves something of the night's radiance. One thrilled to the burnished glamour of her nearness. Her very silence was pregnant with meaning.

She sat curiously still, save for the slight swaying motion of the beast under her. She was as still as the night, yet taut, vibrating, turgid, teeming with fecundity like the warm, scented night. She held one enthralled with her subtle, stealthy, powerful presence, requiring neither gesture nor the spoken word to convey the secret urgency of her being. . . .

Dawn was approaching when a halt was called. The moon had tarnished. For long moments there was a black pall over the glade in which we had sought a short rest. When the light came up over the rim of the plains the whole caravan turned its face towards Mecca, heads were bowed to earth in obeisance to Allah. To me, nothing could have made a more fitting close to that perfect night than this, the first time of the five daily prayers.

There was little time for rest, however. After a hurried meal we were on our way again. The sun had risen then, flooding the heavens with molten gold. We rode in a south-easterly direction, so that the strong light was at our backs and filling the country before us. We passed into a valley and loped steadily in a long string. The earth all around us

was fresh and green in the morning light, washed into new being, as it were, by the warm rays of the rising sun.

I think we must have progressed in this way for about two hours when the first discordant note was sounded. We were naturally keeping away from the beaten tracks. Two of the cameleers had ridden ahead towards the mouth of the valley. They returned swiftly with the news that a detachment of Banderia were heading in our direction.

So far we had encountered nothing but a few stray shepherds, an occasional farmstead. We had given all signs of habitation a wide berth. Now these troops had to be faced. A halt was called. We would rest until the detachment had passed by. As far as the scouts could ascertain, there were about twenty-five Arab troops, with a Spanish officer and N.C.O.s of various nationalities. Apparently we had about thirty men to face.

It had to come sooner or later. These bands were roaming all over the countryside. I guessed they would make a beeline for us. They did. The officer, a thick set Spaniard of some thirty years, a regular tough-looking wallah with a blue jowl and a fierce eye, ordered the menfolk of the caravan to line up.

That suited us. It happened to be part of our plan, for we had prepared ourselves for any such emergency. As we went forward our women retreated to where the camels were barracked. It was by way of being a tense moment. The officer stared at us with all the insolence of his breed. We numbered fifteen youths and men. His force was about double

ours—not counting the women. But we were not worrying.

We knew precisely what the procedure would be. This fellow would choose ten or a dozen of our number, leaving the remainder to carry on with the caravan—three old men for which the Spanish nationalists had little use.

It goes without saying that those of us who had already had more than enough of the Spanish Army would put up a pretty stiff fight. The commander of the Banderia behaved in the manner we had anticipated. He dismissed the three old men. A round dozen of us left, Jenkins at one end of the line and I at the other. And anything might happen at any moment.

As friend Jenks would say—"This is where we start something."

The Spaniard walked up to me, pushed his jowl forward, stared as if he would print my image on his mind, then fired a few questions. He did not know it, but the Mauser under my cloak was pointing straight at his midriff. I ignored his questions. He wanted to know to what tribe I belonged. No man moved, or spoke. He yapped a little louder. Still no response from me.

Then he raised his crop with the idea of slashing me across the jaw. He was just a split second too late. My gun barked. He clapped his hands to his belly, doubled up, sank in a heap.

It is not easy to describe what followed. I guess there was a dead stop to everything for several bewildering moments. His mob was too astonished to move. In those brief seconds we had drawn

our guns, started to back away towards the cleft behind us, to which the women and the three old men had retreated with the beasts and the baggage.

Then, with sudden cries of rage, the detachment came at us in a bunch. We blazed away at them, still backing cautiously. Behind us, at the opening of the cleft, the women had been quietly piling boulders. Our fire had effectively checked the rush. The first round was ours. Some of the mob had dropped never to rise again. The remainder dropped for cover.

We scrambled into the breastworks prepared for us. Never for a moment did we cease fire. The detachment, leaderless, disorganised, saw we meant business. They tried to scuttle for cover, but those who made the attempt went down under a shower of lead. The rest of them lay in the scrub of the valley bed and played for safety.

Thereafter a pitched battle with the shots of both sides pinging and echoing up and down the glade. Ours was most efficient cover. They were more or less exposed. It was now too late for any of them to move. To them the whole manœuvre had been so totally unexpected. The sudden loss of their commander left them in a state of uncertainty. There was nothing they could have done then, except drop in their tracks and fight it out.

Already half their number were laid out, dead or dying. One of the N.C.O.'s attempted to take charge of the situation from where he lay behind a heap of scrub and stones. We concentrated on him for several hot minutes. After that we heard

his voice no more. Nobody else attempted to assume command. By that time it was a case of every man for himself.

It was by way of being a novel sensation, this fighting from the other side of the fence. Our retreat upon the breastworks at the mouth of the cleft had proved a very neat bit of strategy. We had not sustained a single casualty. The women behind us were not idle. They charged the Mausers as fast as we could fire them.

Queer little things stick in the mind at times like that. The dead Spaniard's mount had wandered up the glade, was quietly browsing on the hillside, unaffected by the rattle of musketry. Adusha, who seemed to have taken charge, ordered us to cease fire. Then she called out to the Arabs to come over and join us.

That was a fatal move. Five of them were peppered in the back by their N.C.O.'s before we could do anything about it. They jumped to their feet and ran towards us, their hands reaching to the sky. Before they could make it they were dropped.

That started the women shrieking. The din those five creatures set up was positively deafening. We had our work cut out to prevent them from leaping the breastworks and rushing at the N.C.O.'s who had shot the Arabs.

There was no need for their excitement, however. In a few moments the remaining Arabs had turned on those non-commissioned officers and were battering them unmercifully. We strolled out of the cleft and stood watching this final phase of one of the craziest little skirmishes I've ever seen.

DEATH SQUADS IN MOROCCO

The direction we took after leaving Xauen is of no special interest—except to those who would drag me back to that hell on earth, the Spanish Foreign Legion. Let it suffice to say that it led friend Jenks and me to the home stretch, for as I write, and maybe as you read, the war of revolt is still proceeding apace in the fair lands of Morocco and Spain.

THE END

